The Divine Sequence

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THE DIVINE SEQUENCE.

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THE DIVINE SEQUENCE.

A TREATISE

ON

CREATION AND REDEMPTION.

BY

F. M.

'Verily Thou art a hidden God.'

LONDON:
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
1873.

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DEDICATED

TO THE

SACRED MEMORY OF A GREAT SORROW.

PREFACE.

In offering this volume to the public I feel bound to crave indulgence, for one fault especially; namely, a certain amount of repetition. In my earnest desire to place my subject-matter before my readers in one particular point of view, I found myself unable to avoid this.

As regards the whole treatise, I submit unreservedly and entirely every opinion and every expression to ecclesiastical authority and the judgment of the Church.

1872.

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THE

DIVINE SEQUENCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN GOD REVEALED THROUGH THE CREATION.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.'—St. John i. 1.

In the long lapses of eternity—before creation,—the Word was, and the Word was with God.

The vast universe fades before us, and we try to carry our thoughts, slowly and with difficulty, to the time before time, when the Everlasting Being, dwelling alone, Three Persons in one God, had not yet called the worlds out of chaos and suspended them in space.

In unbroken calm, in unruffled, pure being,

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dwelt the undivided Trinity, with whom is no past and no future, but all is unbroken present. 'In the beginning,'—that beginning which was no commencement, no breaking off of one period and springing up of another; but the changeless, self-existing, self-contained being of God in the endless backward flowing ages of eternity, before it had pleased Him to produce an act outside of Himself: and when, self-involved and self-sufficing, the eternal begetting of God the Son by God the Father, and the eternal procession of God the Holy Ghost from Father and Son are the only acts we can predicate of the Godhead,—the self-sustained act of pure, everlasting, and immutable being.

But creation was to be. Its possibilities lay for ever in the Divine mind. The creation of matter and its endless combinations, the first atom, or the first force, and the laws which were to form and transform it, were for ever possible to the Creator and were for ever intended by Himself.

What was the great mystery of creation, what was the secret motive, if we dare so speak, which induced a self-sufficing Being to produce a universe, of which He alone was the

motive power? This reason we must seek for in the Divine essence itself.

There could be no motive outside Himself. There could be no necessity which compelled the perfect independence of pure Being to bring about what we may be allowed to call a phase, though not a change.

There is but one phrase which expresses God. It is a phrase we could not have formed for ourselves. It needed to be divinely revealed, and its revelation is an epitome of the entire creation, redemption, and future prospect of the whole universe.

That one phrase is the touchstone of truth: it is the golden key which unlocks all mysteries; it is the specific which heals all evil. It is the only possible explanation of all that we see, feel, and suffer in ourselves and in all around us. Without it life is impossible; apart from this one sublime and brief explanation, existence would be a lie, and death a solecism.—God is Love.

Three little words tell us all; and in telling all, explain all. And yet we go on our way weeping and wondering, and failing to perceive how those three words contain all we know of

God, all we can know, and, oh! wonderful force of divinely instituted language, all that there is to know. The angels know no more, and the devils know no less. And if any of the children of men will only take those words to his heart, feed on them, repeat them, suck their sweetness, dive into their inscrutable depth, and repose on their inexhaustible strength, not only will he never be without a light upon his path, but he himself will grow ever more and more into the likeness of that God of whom all he knows is, that God is Love.

Let us take this little phrase to pieces and dissect it. Let us see how these three words, like a verbal trinity of infinite wisdom, contain the kernel of all we know of the Divinity. When we call Him by His name of God, we feel that there is above us and around us a supreme Being whom we blindly seek. He is our great Necessity.

We may lose ourselves in the devious path of life, fritter away our precious moments, exhaust our little span of existence in pleasure or in pain; but beneath all, interwoven with all, is the blind sense of the Being who called

us out of nothing; and who, from behind all the clouds of dust that our restless folly raises around us, we know, and sometimes we distinctly feel, is looking down on us with the eternal eyes that pierce the darkness, and behold all our misery and all our weakness. It is only the fool who has said there is no God:[1] and he said it, not in his intellect, which would have given him the lie; not in his reason, which would have scoffed at the assertion; but in his depraved heart, in his affections gone astray, in his wild passions, in his multiplied errors. In spite of all vain philosophies and all unreasoning theories, the sense of the existence of God does not fade out of the heart of man; and, whether he adore or blaspheme, he knows there is One above him.

There has never, since the Creation, been a period in which more has been written to disprove God, either in His essence or in His attributes; And there never, since the creation, was a period when the sense of God was more universal, more profound or more intense, than it is now. Nothing proves it so much as the

[1] Psalm xiv. 1.

effort to disprove. We do not attack myths and legends with the animosity, the acrimony, and the subtlety with which we attack truth. As it is only the true faith which can produce the excess of impiety, so it is only the true God whose existence can call forth such desperate warfare against himself.[1] There is no surer proof that God is, than the hatred with which some of His creatures regard Him. False philosophy is the inside-out of truth, and tells quite as strongly in favour of what it attempts to disprove as the writings of the saints. Error is the correlative of truth, and our enemies do but fight the Lord's battles with other weapons.

Many are led astray; many are deceived. They fall out of the current of eternal truth, as the spray of the waterfall is scattered and lost upon the river's bank. But the impetuous torrent sweeps its liquid atoms in one full tide towards the great ocean; and, whether the waters be muddy or limpid, they are all equally absorbed in its fathomless depths. God is Love, and, being Love, He brings good out of

[1] See 'Les Principes générateurs des Constitutions politiques, par De Maistre.

evil, sweet out of bitter, light out of darkness, until in the end Truth herself shall be raised on the bucklers of her enemies.

Do not let us be disturbed and disquieted by the attacks of heresy, and liberalism, positivism, or materalism, against God and His church. If the Church were less stable the enemy would slumber. It is the force, the vitality, the exuberance of faith which elicits such rage in the unbelieving. We must have the reverse of the medal, but the medal is pure gold for all that.

Has not our own Master, Him for whom we fight, told us that power is made perfect in infirmity?[1]

The more the battle rages, the more sure are we of victory in the end; and, for each fresh attack that breaks upon our inner calm, let us be assured that at some other point of the great combat between truth and error, a victory is being gained. We grieve for those who are so blinded and so misguided. We cannot enough weep for the offence against God, or pray for their conversion. But to be discouraged and

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

alarmed for the cause itself, instead of only (though that alas! is much) for individual souls, is to forget Who it is Who only *seems* to slumber at the vessel's prow.

God *is*. Why are there comparatively so few who plunge their souls in meditation on the nature of God? Why do we so constantly break up into fragments the one great conception of God as pure Being, and shrink from bringing ourselves as much as possible face to face with the first truth, the great truth, the all-containing truth?

It is a great mistake to suppose that the thought of God, in the abstract, is too profound for some to be profitable for all. As it is out of that depth that all the mysteries of the faith are evolved, must it not be most profitable to look, so far as we can, into the depth itself? Nay, rather, if we lay hold of any one of those mysteries, do we not feel that they let us down gently and infallibly into that depth; returning themselves into their origin and bearing us with them, safely and surely, to rest in its immensity? There is nothing in nature and nothing in grace which is not, as it were, a chain to draw us up to God, or to let us down into

His bosom. Everything we can lay hold of hangs on to Him, and should help to lead us to Him. All life would be full of sweetness if we realised this more fully and, above all, more habitually. It is the forgetfulness of God Who lies hid at the end of every event, and Who is the centre of all the tangled labyrinth of life, which throws such obscurity in our hearts and on our path. We break up the thought of God into a thousand fractions, like the shattered colours of a kaleidoscope. Each separate piece, fair as it may be, can do but little to enlighten or embellish our life. But if we allow these fragments, beautiful but incomplete in themselves, to fall into the perfect diagram, then we possess a significant and truthful whole, full of meaning and eternal. So it is with the thought of God, in the purity of His Being, and in the perfection of His essence.

We waste our intellectual and our spiritual strength in too great complexity; we lose sight of the value of uniform ideas; we break the ray into prismatic colours which dazzle more than they illuminate. We get out of the shadow of immensity because it oppresses our

littleness; but we forget that only the eye which is accustomed to a wide horizon learns to measure vast spaces, and recognise what is afar off.

There is a certain intellectual training necessary (save in very exceptional cases, which no man can discern for himself) for all true development of the interior life. And first in importance is the accustoming the mind to deep and abstract contemplation of great Truths. It is a strain at first, unless past intellectual habits have made it comparatively easy. The inferior part of our nature shrinks from the keen air of those sublime heights, and would gladly amuse itself with little practices and diluted considerations. But in this, as in everything else, it is only those who, by moral and intellectual mortification, train their souls to a more bracing atmosphere who will at last breathe the mountain air, and contemplate the glorious expanse below.

One of the great evils of our day and generation is the want of simplicicy, and consequently of true grandeur in ourselves, in our daily lives, and in our intercourse with each other.

Grandeur and complicity do not go together.

Our complex life, our complex ideas, our complex forms: all these are trivial, petty, and feeble. We are for ever dividing ourselves into a thousand fragments, our time, our thoughts, our habits. We break the unity of our external existence by breaking the unity of our inner life. We are for ever producing ourselves outside self, for the gratification of our own vanity, or to command the admiration of others. And so it ends in our becoming so many marionettes in a mock play of genteel comedy; and the seriousness, the gravity, and the dignity of life die out of us.

What place can the great thought of God find in such disjointed souls? A few prayers murmured before a Being Whose very presence we have failed to realise; a few meditations grafted on to an imperfectly conceived subject. Some acts of charity in which the object, God, is lost sight of in the subject of the act. And for the rest a crowd of spiritual meannesses, a host of venial sins, the natural imperfections of character just in their old place, undisturbed as ever: and the whole of the inner life frittered away without effecting one notable result; and leaving the soul arid and impoverished, till

Death comes to measure the distance between It and its Creator! Out of this complicity grows multiplicity. How much would be gained if only we could persuade ourselves to beware of multiplicity! We think we do great things when we do many things. It is exactly the multiplicity which prevents the greatness. It is the lower animals that are the most prolific, and above all, insects; and among insects, especially the maggot. We forget how very circumscribed is our substance, even our intellectual substance; just as, practically, we forget how very short is our life. By dividing and subdividing our littleness we fancy we shall produce more effect; whereas we lose all our strength by losing our unity, and, like the sticks of an unbound faggot, each one apart from the rest is easily snapt in two. It is only by binding ourselves well together, in a stern, intellectual, and moral simplicity, that we can work well for God or for our fellow men.

It is a hard task. It has to be the effort of every moment, and it must consist in cutting off and paring down the superfluities of our lesser acts. We must train our thoughts that we may train our utterances, and we must

husband our strength in silence and contemplation, that we may not waste our energies in mere trifling. Moreover, if we are making the effort out of intellectual pride or for personal aggrandisement, we shall fall into pedantry, or prudery, rather than grow into the simple grandeur of a soul that is for ever striving to stand face to face with the great God. How can we hope to purify our hearts of their innate miseries, meanness, and vile passions, unless we overpower the littleness of sin by the greatness of God's grace? It is a long and not always effectual effort to drive our faults out one by one: we are so blind that half a dozen escape us altogether; and those we do see are so subtle that they slip out of our grasp. But if we open the flood-gates of our soul to the presence of God and to the thought of God's love, the swarm of evil things will be suffocated by the pure waters of grace almost without our being conscious that, one by one, they are dying out. High thoughts, and single aims, pour like sudden sunlight on the dark corners of our soul. Fixing our thoughts on God, we forget ourselves, and meanwhile, His light is transforming us and we grow more like to that

which we contemplate. In our mistaken desire after multiplicity there is often as much an error of judgment as an imperfection of our nature. We forget that our great workshop is in ourselves, and, finding in many cases that we have no very marked and distinct external work to do for God, we are tempted to think we must remain useless and unoccupied; and with ever so little zeal for God's service this thought cannot fail to discourage us. But here lies our mistake. We believe that our labours are to be external. We think there is nothing great or good but what is evident. We must *see* our work, and mark its progress, and calculate its effects, or else we do not believe in its existence. Does not this prove how readily we lose sight of the great truth, that we are to live by faith and not by sight? We are always clamouring for evidence, and forgetting that the great realities are just those which are least within the range of our senses. Our workshop is in ourselves. It is there we have to carve out the image of Jesus. It is there we have to raise a temple to the Lord. The stones lie in the quarry, unhewn. Our thoughts, our hopes, our aspirations, and our

prayers are the materials with which we work. The labour is arduous, for it must be mostly solitary; and often our tears are our bread, day and night.[1] The sound of those redoubled blows with which we fashion the stones of the edifice are heard by none but God and ourselves. We temper the mortar with our tears; our limbs bend and our hearts bleed beneath the unseen burdens which we carry. But the great architect is with us, and it is by gazing incessantly on Him that we learn the plan of that temple which, in each separate soul, He would have us build for himself—separate in its beauty, diverse in its form, various in its purposes; but all full of His loveliness according as He has revealed it to our inner sight. 'He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh cities.'[2] Be assured this inner work is more precious than all the seven works of charity without it. And the reason is plain. First, it predisposes to all such charity as may be presented to us to accomplish. Secondly, external charity without it is as 'sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.'[3] Thirdly, and

[1] Psalm xli. 4. [2] Proverbs, xvi. 32.
[3] St. Paul's 1st Epistle to Corinthians, xiii. 1.

chiefly, the hermit in the desert who has no outward charities to perform may be a great saint; whereas without it, St. Vincent of Paul himself would have been but an ordinary man.

Once more, our workshop is within us, and it is there that God calls upon us to fashion ourselves for His service. We may not know what that service will be. We may pass away without ever feeling we had any marked outer work to do for His glory. Our sphere may be limited and our life solitary. But no matter: Let us perfect the inner man in the light of God's presence, and then only shall we be meet for whatever task He may appoint us. If God call us to be a sword, let us keep ourselves bright and keen; if a harp, let our chords be attuned to Him; if a staff, let us be strong and firm, and then *wait.* Waiting is the great work of life; waiting for the Divine breath, waiting for the Divine hand. All here is preparation. All hereafter is fruition. 'In your patience you shall possess your souls,'[1] and 'Wait thou for the Lord,'[2] for 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'

[1] St. Luke xxi. 19. [2] Psalm xxvi. 14.

It is only by getting rid of the complexity of our thoughts, and the multiplicity of our purposes, that we can offer ourselves as vessels to be filled by God Himself. How can He find place in our crowded inner lives? Instead of presenting to divine grace an even and transparent surface in which the light may be reflected, our hearts resemble those circular mirrors often suspended at the end of a gallery of pictures, and round the margin of which are smaller circles; so that the objects are represented larger in the centre and repeated in a lesser form around, while the whole is out of proportion and distorted. It is not the impediments presented by sin itself which we are here considering. It is an impediment which partakes of an intellectual as well as of a moral character. It is the absence of the power, or rather the habit of concentration. It is the moral cowardice which makes almost every one shrink from interior solitude. It is the deeply-rooted and utterly fatal intellectual habit of peopling the mind with insignificant thoughts, and permitting to the imagination the spiritual dram-drinking of castle-building. We fancy, perhaps, that our lives are sufficiently

free from worldly distractions to allow the hope of our growing near to God. We have given up, or never known, what the world calls its pleasures and its amusements. But have we ever stopped to calculate the noise, the scramble, and the undignified haste which is going on within us? What amount of silence reigns in our soul from morn till night? What pauses have there been in the endless chain of pictures, fancies, desires, and cravings which we have *voluntarily permitted* and *hospitably entertained* in that great centre of our being which is essentially ourselves?

Until we have made superhuman efforts to sweep away all this interior rubbish, the rays of divine grace cannot penetrate the depths of our soul, and illuminate all with the presence of God. Superhuman, indeed! Courage beyond all utterance is needed for this cleansing of the Augean stables. The starving of ourselves morally—a long Lent of blackest fast.

The ways of God are as various as they are hidden; and sometimes it pleases Him, in the plenitude of His mercies, suddenly to illuminate a soul by a great stroke of light. His preventing grace makes all comparatively smooth.

And rapidly the shadows flee away, and the daylight breaks upon the already half made saint, as in those lands where twilight is unknown. These are the exceptions. But even these are not exempted, at one period or another of their progress, from that night of the soul of which St. John of the Cross writes so profoundly.

But the more usual way of God with His creatures—whom He invariably leaves in full possession of their own free will—is to open the gates of that dim cavern of ourselves, and invite us to descend into the depths and wait there for Himself.

Some few are drawn into the inner life, and may almost say that they could not resist. But the truth with regard to the greater number is, that although invited, they either do not hear or do not understand the call, and go past the deep cool recesses where the inner life lies hid, in search of the fields and flowers beyond.

They miss their higher vocation; they dwell on the surface of holy things. They taste the sweets of devotion; but they escape the inheritance that should have been theirs, and

they rob the church of God of souls that might have been saints, and heroes, and martyrs of love.

Is there a sight more sad, or more frequent, than that of a lost vocation to the inner life? Is there anything more common than to behold a life spent in complexity and multiplicity, which, had it been maintained in unity and simplicity, would have given tenfold more glory to God, and been a burning and shining light on the darkness of the world? So long as we content ourselves with believing that devotion consists in an almost infinite variety of exercises and practices; so long as small details of devotion are put in the place of devotional habits of mind; so long as the bustle and hurry of a half-worldly round of so called charitable works, or rather business, is put in lieu of inner mortification and habits of meditation; so long, alas! will hundreds continue to miss the higher paths, and, contenting themselves with a very moderate progress, never truly conquer self, or shine as stars in the firmament of heaven.

There are people who enter upon the question of a devout life as children enter a toy-shop.

Dazzled by all they see, they cease to be capable of a preference or a definite choice, and end in scrambling as many devotions into their hands as they can carry, walking forth with a burden of treasures, not one of which they have the time or the power thoroughly to understand and admire.

It was not thus that the saints of old were fashioned.

There are two supreme devotions which lie at the base of all others, and contain them all at least by implication.

The first devotion is to the existence of God. The second is to the Passion of Our Saviour Jesus. The first formed the Old Testament saints. The second, combined with the first, has produced the great lights of Christianity. Viewed in their aspect as regards time, the first precedes the second; and it may therefore be permitted us to contemplate it for a while apart from the second, and try to perceive what was the class of saints that it necessarily produced, and what were their special characteristics. In doing so we shall arrive more surely at an appreciation of what that same devotion may be expected to effect in ourselves, and what

will be its further developments when blended with that devotion which was only foreshadowed by anticipation in the Old Testament saints, but which to us is the corner-stone of our whole spiritual existence, and the corner-stone of the Church itself.

It is hardly necessary to dilate upon it. Words seem almost superfluous. The moment we turn to those great figures of antiquity, the patriarchs and the prophets, there seem to rise before us the very types of a grand and noble simplicity. They are 'taillés en bloc,' to use a term our own language does not afford us. They are noble children in the childhood and youth of humanity. Their very faults, their crimes, their aberrations from God, are the faults and sins of a type in which duplicity, subtlety, and labyrinthine motives, seem to find but a small part.

Their whole lives are carved in a bolder form, and with larger dimensions. The laws of nature hold a predominant part in their daily life, and with these the simple grandeur and occult harmony of nature's laws.

Their joys were large and generous. Their griefs were profound and imperious. Their

memory was ever green and tenacious, their gratitude lifelong (like their animosities). Human respect was little known, with its thousand meannesses and its cringing pettiness. Slander and calumny could find small space in the wide, well-aired liberty of their honourable daily labour. The comparative license of their manners was more like the innocent immodesty of children, too near to Paradise to have learnt as yet that they are naked. There was exuberance, where in these days there would be lust. There was violence where now we should find malice; boldness where now there would be arrogance, and rashness where now it would be cruelty. Their virtues were a grand and predominant reverence, a deep and unhesitating faith, a profound humility, and an ever-present dependence on the good providence of God.

These were the virtues which tempered their rudeness. These were the graces which raised the natural instincts of humanity almost into merits, and gave the world the aspect of a great playground, where much liberty is allowed because innocence will not degenerate into license.

We seem to breathe freer when we go out of

the close atmosphere of our complex lives, with the petty and multiplied surroundings of our modern civilization, and its gnat-like swarms of hourly difficulties and incessant scruples, and look back on the grand old world of the patriarchs and the prophets who walked with God.[1]

The broad streams of Jordan; the cluster of cypress on the vineyards of Engaddi;[2] the silent flowing waters of Siloe;[3] the bitter fountains of Mara;[4] the olives on the hill-sides of Jerusalem; all that varied and typical world lay in its wondrous beauty, waiting for the fulfilment of the promise, and traversed in its length and breadth by those holy men. The silence of a day of expectation lay on creation; the dawning of a bright hope and the looking forward to the promise, absorbed in its grandeur the littleness of life, and gave a grave dignity to humanity.

The miracles of those days took a more material form; and if God no longer as in Paradise, 'walked with man in the afternoon air,'[5] yet visions, and angels, and dreams might

[1] Genesis v. 22.
[2] Canticles i. 13.
[3] Isaiah viii. 6. St. John ix. 11.
[4] Exodus xv. 23. Judith v. 15.
[5] Genesis iii. 8.

come at any hour, and did come not unfrequently. The attitude of waiting and of listening is in itself an attitude of concentration and simplicity, and it was the attitude of mankind in those days. God was less really near to man then than He is now, when we have the Blessed Eucharist in every Catholic village church, and the seven fountains of the sacraments for ever watering the way-sides of life. But the further we advance in the kingdom of grace, the more hidden does it become. And in those old days, when Abraham might be accosted by three angels as he stood at the door of his tent, and Moses might hear a voice from a burning bush, it is certain that our forefathers had palpable evidence of the interference of the Divinity in the life and ways of man, which to us is covered, though not concealed, under deeper mysteries.

These conditions of their life, and the form revelation assumed to them, kept them in a very constant contemplation of God in His existence, and in His attributes. Hence their grand simplicity, hence their humility and their absence of human respect.

They were noble children, and 'whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of heaven as a

little child shall not enter into it.'[1] If we, too, would grow simple and childlike, let us put before us the great, the primitive, and the all-containing devotion to the thought of God in His pure being, His Eternity, and His Immensity.

In those dark hours of life when sorrow closes round us like a cold fog, shutting out all human consolation, and covering the heavens with a thick veil; the quiet thought of God reaches our heart with the distinctness and individuality which every sound acquires in a dense, moist atmosphere. All images are shut out. The trees loom dark and dim, though they are close beside us. The church tower is invisible, though we know we ought to see it behind that clump of firs. The only thing we can discern in this palpable obscurity is the song of the bird, and the tolling of the bell, vibrating louder than usual, and bursting upon us with sudden distinctness. Thus comes to us the simple thought of God in the dark struggles of life. The outline of everything is defaced. The most familiar objects have

[1] St. Luke xviii. 17.

become obscure to our sight. But the thought of God pulses through the mist, and fills us with awe and hope. Yes hope! immutable, serene, ever-present, and eternal. God is our God for ever and ever. We go back to the long ages when the world was not, and we remember that even then we lay involved in the Everlasting Mind as one of the possible beings He designed to call out of creation. And that design was a special and an individual love. Stupendous thought! God loved us before we were. It was because He loved us that He created us. It was not only love; it was preference. Why, we cannot tell, but so it was, and so it is. Redemption, and justification, and sanctification are, as it were, the consequent continuation of the thoughts of the creation, the elaborating of that first impulse of love by which God called us out of chaos. I might in a moment of horrible doubt and agony, almost forget that Jesus has died for me. I might in the anguish of my soul, lose sight of the graces that I have received: my baptism, my being a child of the Church, my resting within its pale. But I have only to be conscious that I exist to have before me the certain and irre-

fragable proof of creative love. The very agony I am enduring, while it proves to me that I am, proves to me the love of predilection which gave me my being. The antecedent[1] will of God called me out of the abyss and put me in the light of actual life. Nothing can reverse that. Not God Himself can go back from the fact that He loved me enough to create me. That is certain. No subsequent events can alter that fact. My sins may send me to perdition; but they cannot blot out the moment when I—this small, miserable, suffering I—sprang out of chaos into existence. And it is by that moment I measure the immensity of God's love; the moment when the Creator deigned to form His creature, and to love the work of His own hands. *This*, then, was God's antecedent will towards me—a will which involved creative love; a will which made me His work, His child, His possession; and which must be eternal in the future as it has been eternal in the past. If I am lost, it is because I so will it, by willing the acts which must ruin me: for, I repeat it, God's antece-

[1] See Appendix, Note A.

dent will was a loving will, and must continue so for ever. We lie in the bosom of Immensity, and happen what may, we cannot slip out of the grasp of our Creator. We for ever rest in His hand; and though we have no rights, we have a claim, the claim that we belong to Him.

No other thought can perhaps so blissfully allay our restlessness and anxiety. The sense of sin may overpower us, and make us almost despair of obtaining salvation. But when we look back upon the eternal years and realise the exuberance of love that caused God to create the worlds, and made Him, if we dare so speak, dissatisfied with His own happiness unless He conferred it in part upon others whom He created for that sole purpose, we shall see more clearly how love grows out of love, like deep calling on deep; and we shall better understand that creation is the first link of a stupendous chain of love let down from the bosom of the eternal God to the lowest creature in the universe.

It was this belief in the supreme Being, this conception of the goodness of the great God who hath made the heavens and the earth,

which fashioned the noble strength and beautiful simplicity of the patriarchs.

The promise, for the fulfilment of which they were waiting, did indeed hang on to the end of that chain. But to them it was out of sight. They knew it was sure; but all they saw, all they felt, was the great fact of God, in His Immensity, His eternity, and His beneficent providence. This made them strong. This kept them child-like. And shall we, who know and possess so much more, be inferior to them in the virtues which should be like the large blocks of solid stone laid at the foundation of that temple to the Lord which we are to rear in our souls to His glory?

Let us, then, dilate our hearts in the thought of God; let us creep into the shadow of His presence, and rest secure in His vast paternity.

The meanest and the worst amongst us cares for the work of his own hands. We are His creation, and God is our God for evermore.

In dwelling on the existence of God, we have insensibly taken up the last word of our brief text, for it was almost impossible to speak of God except as love. That one word alone

expresses Him. Were we to say God is power, or God is greatness, we should feel at once we were speaking of one of His attributes, but not of Himself as He is in Himself. Love alone expresses that. Except through that one word, we obtain no adequate idea of the Supreme Being; and while love includes and embraces all His attributes (even his attribute of justice), it alone expresses His essence.

As the tide of time pours through successive ages, its bulk is swollen and its surface widens with the fast developing expectation of the promised redemption. But at the same time the nations grow corrupt; the patriarchal simplicity is lessened, and at last it would seem as if only one narrow stream of the chosen people of God maintained the old traditions, and received fresh confirmations of the promise. Doubtless God had His servants here and there, wherever the sun rose on the races of mankind. But as a whole, the world had fallen away from the truth, and wild passions and blind doubt spread black wings over the great cities of the past. The heathen nations distorted the divine traditions into hideous mysteries, and the devil translated to his own

service the fragments of the pure worship. But as the darkness spread over the majority, so did the light of the promise concentrate itself more and more, there where the servants of the true God were gathered together. Something of the primitive simplicity lingers amongst them, but it has learnt a deeper pathos, like the gravity which comes over the face of youth when the laughter of childhood is hushed.

Then we begin to see, blending in one beautiful sentiment, the love that was fostered by the one devotion to the being of God, and the love which was growing in the blessed expectation and intense longing for the Saviour.

We have tried faintly to realise the way in which our first forefathers contemplated God when all they well knew of Him was the fact that He was their creator, and when the conceptions they formed of His infinite love were drawn almost exclusively from that view. Let us now try to realise the way in which they yearned for the coming of the Messiah, and consequently for that still more marvellous manifestation of love which is conveyed in the redemption.

The stream of prophecy had flowed on unbroken, from the first promise made to Eve in the garden of Paradise, through successive ages. 'She shall crush thy head.' It had been symbolised in the early sacrifices. It had received a fuller and a more mystic development in the offering of Abraham and in the sacrifice of Isaac; in the selling of Joseph, and in his power in Egypt; in the rites of the Levitical law, in the acts of the reign of Solomon; and in the mystic announcements of the prophets. Children had been born into the world whose very names had a divine significance but partially understood by themselves or their parents. For the power of God lay upon man to make him utter dark sayings.

Miraculous interpositions were granted which glanced at something more remote, and far deeper than the actual event. Victims were set apart, the acts of whose lives foreshadowed the supreme victim. The whole world teemed with God-sent omens. Men gazed and wondered; and while the majority did not understand, it was granted to a few to guess vaguely, but hopefully, at the truth.

A people was called aside as the people of

God, with whom every fact in their history was prophetic. Melchisedec, Jacob, and Joseph walk the earth, the living types of the coming Messiah. They carry in their very existence, to an extent unknown to themselves, the promise of the future. The Levitical law takes up the theme and presents itself as a series of hieroglyphics, the key to which is the birth of the Son of God. The expectation deepens, the heart of man beats high; the whole of creation takes up the song of hope; and David, the man after God's own heart, is inspired to write the national songs of Israel, which have become for ever after the national songs of the Church of God. So full are they of the sweet mysteries of Jesus, that no more is needed by the spouse of Christ than still to sing the same words, now that Her Beloved is with her, as those that spoke in distant prophecy of His advent.

Such was the power of the expectation of Jesus; what, then, must be the possession of Him? A deeper tone runs through the expression of divine prayer and praise as the expectation increases, like the silence of the night gradually broken by the wakening songs

of birds, anticipating the dawn. The whole arcana of the deep, inner spiritual life, seem unfolded to David. The joy, the peace, and the anguish of the mystic life, is known to him through the mere hope of that, which to us is fruition. The hunger and thirst for God have done for him what sitting at the feast has done for us, and, by a marvellous anticipation, the dim prescience of redeeming love, the Psalms of David and the canticles of Solomon, contain all the science of the most mystical of God's saints.

What a past there lies behind us, what a present is ours; and where in ourselves are the garnered fruits of this long and plentiful harvest? Let us ask for the 'old paths,' that we may walk in them. Instead of living in the fragment of time which we call the present, let us learn habitually to connect one age with another, and see how wondrously each hangs on to each; what unity there is in God's dealings with his creatures, as well as what development.

He is the same God for ever and ever; but we lose the breadth and depth of meditation and prayer, which might be ours if we looked

more deeply into revelation as a whole—the past verifying the present, and the present the bud and promise of the future. Such habits of thought would give greater expanse to our views, and greater liberty of spirit. We should be less crushed by the accumulation of our own small miseries, and we should have more hope for ourselves and more certainty of the glorious future of the Church of God. We should spread the cords of our tents, and make wider preparations for coming triumphs; nor should we be so hesitating, so trembling, so cowardly, in the ventures that we make for Jesus and His cause.

If it be true that we dwell too much absorbed in the small events of this life, as compared with the eternity which awaits us, it is also true with respect to the great events of the past in the history of God's Church; and consequently of the pledges we have received in them of future blessings. Our hearts fail us as we look around and see divided opinions, varied animosities, and strange misunderstandings. Again and again it would seem as if the enemy would triumph, and the cause of truth be overladen by the encroachments of error. But do

we deduce nothing from the triumphs of the past; and have we forgotten the great principle of good being brought out of evil, with which the Eternal God governs His universe? We live in our own little moment of time, and we forget the enormous developments which the present, morally and religiously, has over the past. We calculate the age of the world from a certain date, not very far removed from our own, and we fail to see the progress made. Above all, with a natural and almost praiseworthy inconsiderateness, we count only from the blessed Christian era. But the world before Christ was also God's creation and God's world. The souls that lived and suffered, and sinned, and repented then, were no less dear to Him than those of the present hour; and Jesus shed His Blood retrospectively for them as prospectively for us. We forget that in God's sight and in His divine intention it is always the same history:—the world awaiting the Saviour, the world with the Saviour present in His sacred Humanity, the world with Jesus always present in the most Blessed Sacrament, and the world waiting for His second advent. And because we neglect to take it as a whole, we lose sight

of the magnitude of the work accomplished, and the entire certainty with which this should inspire us that the work is still progressing, and will progress; not only through the ages of time, but through all eternity. It is little more than eighteen hundred years ago that the 'Word was made flesh'— and what is that in the history of such a mystery?[1] No! there is a sense in which the much misused word 'progress' has a full and a divine meaning—a sense which can only be known to the Sons of the Church, the mistress of nations, and the ark of salvation. We are but in the infancy of the history of the Incarnation, and already our hearts fail us because more has not been accomplished, and because the prince of the power of darkness is still so powerful. Why do we thus measure and curtail the power of the Lord, and fancy the work can never be achieved, and the triumph come, before the end of the world! The Lord counts not time as we do. A thousand years with the Lord is as one day;[2] but also one day is as a thousand years for the amount of work that can be done, and good effected.

[1] See Appendix, Note B.

[2] 2 Peter iii. 8.

'He can give grace *and* glory,' simultaneously if it so please Him. And without professing to prolong the duration of the world and the waiting for the last judgment beyond the general impressions amongst great and holy men; without entering, even by implication, on that vexed question, we may be certain that the work of the triumph of the Church is going on, and will go on, and that through the perils of antichrist, and the terrors that are threatened, the victory is certain; and that it will be on the side of Him who has sat down for ever on the right hand of the Most High until (and let us remark that 'until' is a double word, which implies progression) 'I make thine enemies thy footstool.'[1]

Let us, then, adore God in the past, wait on God in the present, and expect God in the future.

It is by thoughts like these we should nourish in our hearts the liberty which we have in Christ, which St. Paul calls the liberty of the glory of the children of God; and which dates from the Incarnation. Before that event,

[1] Psalm cix. 1.

which united the Creator to His creature, the spirit of bondage reigned over the face of the world. Hardly anywhere in the Old Testament do we find even the Saints calling God 'Father.' Once or twice the Almighty is alluded to under that title,[1] but as if in anticipation of the law of grace and liberty. The idea had not become sufficiently familiar to have been generally adopted. The 'Our Father who art in heaven' had not been pronounced. The chain that binds heaven to earth had not been let down. It was, as we have said before, a time of expection, but not of peaceful possession. The very mode by which God communicated with His creatures had something in it which inspired fear. It was uncertain in its form and irregular in its manifestation. It consisted in the 'unlooked for,' and was received breathlessly. Moreover it was indirect, inasmuch as it was exclusively representative, the angels being the ambassadors and conveying the divine message to that world which had not yet been consecrated by the actual presence of the God-Man. It was the appearance of the supernatural of a

[1] Isaiah lxiii. 16; lxiv. 8.

second order, and the happy familiarity of the Sacraments was altogether absent. The public service of God was of a nature which, though surrounded with every pomp, was wanting in the sweetness and tenderness of the law of grace. It was a service of death, of bloodshedding, and of forfeit. Even the thank-offering had to be consumed in the flames. It spoke of destruction, averted by vicarious sacrifice, rather than of peace and pardon obtained by the one great sacrifice of Calvary, bloodlessly repeated, or more properly continued, in the daily Mass. It was a longing looking forward, and an almost painful foreshadowing of the great event of our redemption, utterly inadequate in itself, and containing far more a picture of death and agony than of joy and reconciliation. That it brought great graces we cannot doubt; for it was divinely instituted, and it produced great Saints. But it is difficult for us to conceive the penitent returning in joy and deliverance from the sacrifice of his sin-offering, as every soul may do, and does every hour of the day from the Sacrament of Penance. He must always have had a looking forward to a distant and uncertain time when something was to take place which

was to give a retrospective value to his sacrifice, and which, until accomplished, in a day he might never see, left everything incomplete. In a certain sense it required greater faith than with us, to believe in the efficacy of his bloody offerings, and to hope on through ages for the coming of Him who was to put His seal, the seal of His own Blood,[1] on the long ago past, and give it efficaciousness.

Oh that dreary longing of the old world; that pining for the dawn, that thirsting for the waters of life which consumed the hearts of God's servants, as generation after generation was born; and married, always in the vague hope of being the chosen channel; and then died out, bequeathing the hope, once more delayed, to the succeeding age! Their hearts must have failed them often as, looking round on the immutable hills, the ever-flowing rivers, the changeless ocean, the rising and setting of the sun, they asked whether the world would ever be otherwise than as they saw it; whether the human race would ever have a certainty to rest

[1] It is impossible that by the blood of oxen and goats, sin hould be taken away. 'But a body thou hast fitted to me.'—Hebrews x. 4, 5.

in. And the very face of beautiful monotonous Nature, which is to us like the confirmation of a blessing, must have seemed to them like a stagnant routine which forbade all hope.

Patriarch and prophet, saint and king, nursed the undying flame, in spite of the long delay. It consumed them the more as it burnt the brighter. They saw the vision afar off but always distant—a 'hope that is deferred.' It was shadowed forth in all things, but in none was it distinctly proclaimed. The time and the mode were uncertain. Thus while the unity of thought concentrated upon one hope—tending to produce a grand simplicity of character—the vagueness and consequent doubtfulness maintained a spirit alien to the full liberty of maturer knowledge and close possession, and left mankind in comparative bondage. They caught at the shadows of prophetic events as they passed along, and in their own lives and nomenclature they personified prophecy, and served as types with a deep mystery they only partially penetrated. They acted and lived according to their own free will, and were but half aware of the part they were playing in the prelude to the world's great drama, con-

ceived in eternity and enacted in time. Sometimes the hope broke forth in song, sometimes in prophetic visions and declarations; and amongst the mysterious and spiritual lamentings of the prophet king, or the deep and awful utterances of the prophets, it appears from time to time like the sudden leaping up of a bright flame, or like a strain of sweet music. When the time draws near, the air quivers, as on the approach of a distant sound. The word, spoken from all eternity, is not yet spoken upon earth. Man waits, the whole world, pagan and Israelitish alike, wait; and the spirit, in broken accents, broken through the faltering lips of man, foretells from hour to hour the approach of the great event, the Incarnation. Until at length the flame of desire culminates in the heart of a young maiden: the voice of God is whispered to her at midnight in a humble dwelling at Nazareth. A low brief colloquy of wonderful majesty and humility takes place between the maiden and the angel; —it is all but silence, it is quite hidden; it is utterly ignored; but nevertheless it is for this hour that the world was created and has waited those four thousand years. It is about to

change the whole aspect of the universe; and as we said before, we are as yet only in the infancy of the history of the Incarnation, which is now, and ever must be, the pivot of all creation, the reason of all we see and know, the cause of everything around us, and its sole solution; and which contains in itself the unknown depths of all possible knowledge because it is the utterance of the Word of God, who dwelleth ever with God in the Bosom of the Father from all eternity, and Who now is made flesh and dwells amongst men.

CHAPTER II.

THE HIDDEN GOD REVEALED THROUGH MARY AND THE INCARNATION.

It is probably impossible for any one of us to conceive the extinction of our being. If we try to think of annihilation, we shall find we are merely contemplating a dim irresponsible existence without pleasure or pain, but still an existence.

We have no difficulty in thinking of our immortality. It is merely carrying on our actual sensations and consciousness of ourselves to an indefinite period, and then adding another indefinite period.

The difficulty would be to say 'This shall be last,' for to the last another joins itself. We have a sense of our immortality, if not a conception of it. We feel it is natural and inevitable that we should go on for ever, and the reverse takes no form in our minds, and is re-

pugnant to us; annihilation being in truth a formless thing, impossible to express, for in the attempt to express it we speak of something that is.

The thought of the duration of man, which is immortality, is therefore comparatively easy to us; it comes to us with the naturalness of a truth concerning ourselves. But it is different with the thought of eternity, which is the duration of God. We are lost in the backward rolling ages which have no name, when creation had no actuality, but lay hidden in the Eternal Idea of the Eternal God.[1]

As with Him there is no past and no future,

[1] The difficulty is immeasurably increased by this absence of the actuality of creation. We are incapable of realising the existence of being independent of accident. We have no lever on which to poise the thought, and it slips from us into utter vagueness. The creation is the first revelation to us of God; and though we know that He pre-existed from all eternity, yet can we put our knowledge into no form. A dull sense of incomprehensibility creeps over us; and we are simply lost in the attempt to grasp the idea of the blessed Trinity, when the Three Persons in Unity was all that we could predicate of the Godhead.

The illimitable 'I am' was alone, and being had taken no form and had imposed no limits. We know things chiefly by what they are not. Their limits express them. Pure unlimited being escapes our senses as it transcends, though it does not contradict, our reason.

but all is equally present, so creation before it took its place in space, filled the mind of God with as much delight as since His hands have fashioned it. For it was ever before Him. It was part of Himself; for there is no distinction between Himself and His Idea. It was already part of His eternal knowledge of Himself which is the eternal generation of the eternal Word. All its beauty, all its possibilities, lay before Him with his own choice of them, and their glorious sequences, their developments, and their ultimate intentions and perfections. The end was there, with the beginning, and the endlessness of eternity with the far-off future of this projected creation. It takes us time and space to express it. To Him it is an ever-present whole without break, without contradiction, without hindrance. We are compelled, in speaking at all of so incomprehensible a mystery, to use words which compress within such narrow bounds the inward thought, that in uttering it we seem only to blur it and make it indistinct. But although all things were foreknown by the Almighty, and all equally foreknown at the same instant, still, if we may so express it, there was a rhythmical

procession in the Divine intentions, which has something of the nature of cause and effect (Himself being the First Supreme Cause). Thus granted, as we must grant it, that the Divine Essence predetermined to unite Itself to matter, we come upon the first of a series of beautiful deductions and stupendous consequences, which were all equally and simultaneously present to the Eternal Mind, but which inevitably present themselves to our cognisance in succession, like the links of a mysterious chain. Feebly and humbly let us try to hold on to these links, and raising ourselves up higher and higher by their aid, penetrate so far as we dare into the antecedent will of God. We shall find it to be no vain speculation, but full of truth and redolent of grace. The first thing that strikes us is the marvellous love of this intention of the Divine Being. The Eternal Father is self-contained in His own immensity; and the co-extensive, co-eternal knowledge of Himself, is the generation of the Divine Word, the Son of God. We look at ourselves in a mirror, and we behold our own image. God contemplates Himself in Himself, and the Image of God is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity in all things like

unto and equal with Himself. God utters Himself in the Word. And the Word uttered is equal to Him who utters it. The generation of the Word is therefore necessarily eternal (in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God), because there never could be a time when God did not know Himself, contemplate Himself, utter Himself, and thus generate the second Person with an eternal generation. Perfect knowledge also is perfect love. The perfect love of Father and Son is the eternal and mutually exhaled procession of the third person, God the Holy Ghost, Who cannot be less than either, and must proceed equally from both, for God does not know Himself more than He loves Himself. The knowledge and the love must be coextensive, and must have existed from all eternity; and thus we have the equality of the three divine Persons with the distinctness of their persons and the unity of their substance, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity.

How complete, how perfect, how self-satisfying! And yet God seems to want something more. (May He forgive the poverty

of our language!) And as if the immensity of His love had overflowed, creation drops from the eternal Hand in the exuberance of His beneficence. He desires to communicate Himself otherwise than in Himself, and the whole chain of creation is the result. There is behind this mystery another, which we tremble to investigate—Why the Divine Being should have desired to take up matter into Himself, to wed Himself to matter, to clothe Himself in matter? There is but one possible answer, and that answer is love. He would create that He might make other beings, each in their measure, participate in the happiness which is in Him; and then to make it more perfect, to make it complete, He would raise up His creatures to Himself, by first abasing Himself to His creatures.

But the procession of the Divine idea, as we have already ventured to call it, first took another direction; for the creation of the angels preceded the creation of man. He descended from a higher to a lower form of being, reserving the lower as that to which He would become united in His Divine essence. He created His ministers before He created

those on whom at His bidding they were to wait. He created Her court before the birth of their Queen. But the cause of all creation being the Sacred Humanity, first in the procession or intention must needs come Her from whom immediately that humanity was derived. The Church applies to the Mother of God those words of Scripture, 'Before the hills were, or ever the mountains were brought forth, the Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity and of old, before the earth was made.' (Prov. viii. 23–35). And then, as we look back on the links of the chain, we find that wonderful pre-eminence given to the position of Mary Immaculate, which the Incarnation, or rather the special mode of the Incarnation, necessitates.

God willed that the race of man should consist of families, for He Himself is a father.[1] He willed that His Son upon earth should be one of a family; and so He pre-ordained Him an earthly mother.[2]

If we fix our eyes upon the Incarnation as the great will of God, we find that Mary is the

[1] Appendix, Note C. [2] Galatians iv. 6.

first point in that will; and, as we have said, the first link in the chain of divine intentions, with something of the relative nature of cause and effect. Thus putting before our minds the eternal will of God, as regards first, the creation of matter; secondly, the Incarnation and its mode, we arrive immediately at the prominence of Mary in the scheme; and none of the prerogatives incident upon this inevitable prominence can further surprise us.

We may venture perhaps to surmise that any other mode of the Incarnation than that actually elected by God would have obscured the idea of the Divine paternity, which is essentially the view of God revealed to us by the Incarnation.[1]

It is the master idea, from which all others emanate; because it is the idea which most truly represents God. We might perhaps figure to ourselves a system in which this principle did not exist; but immediately the beauty dies out of creation, and creation ceases to be that which is its special characteristic, a direct revelation of God in His nature and in His attributes, inasmuch as the paternity of

[1] Romans viii. 14–17. See Appendix, Note D.

God is involved in the doctrine of the Trinity itself.[1] So certain is it that the sense of the paternity of God towards ourselves grows directly and inevitably out of the Incarnation of Jesus in the womb of His Virgin Mother, that it is specially in the New Testament, as we have already remarked, that God is called 'Our Father,' and that mankind, reconciled by the blood of the Saviour, are repeatedly and emphatically styled His children, sons by adoption, as Jesus our elder brother is by natural right.

Nothing is of more importance to our spiritual life than to maintain a sense of proportion, and to seek for a true theological basis for our devotions: 'Lex orandi lex credendi.' We shall not do this by confining ourselves to certain practices, for some of which many amongst us can hardly give a reason.[2]

If we make use of terms the basis and reason of which we have not mastered, we shall impart an appearance of falsity to our devotion; and our reason will not give full assent to our words. And this in the language of

[1] Hebrews i. 5; ii. 11–18.
[2] See Appendix, Note E.

prayer is mockery, though involuntarily so.[1] The terms applied by the Church to our Blessed Lady would seem to be simply exaggeration, unless we lay hold of the true idea of Mary's real place and office in the plan of the Creation and Incarnation. When we reflect upon the image of His intended mother, as it lay in the hidden will of the Supreme Being, in connection with His ultimate intention of creating matter, and taking matter upon Himself as a garment in which to veil his

[1] We are not alluding here to certain forms of expression which may be found in the devotional utterances of the Saints, for example, but only to those terms which involve, however remotely, a dogmatic truth. The utterances which we may harmlessly call exaggerations are on another basis, and must be judged by another standard. When the blessed Laurence of Port Maurice says that he would 'repeat his good resolution as often every moment as there are moments in eternity,' he is merely trying to express the redundancy of a supernatural desire. When St. Francis of Assissi was afraid to pass by the shambles lest the butchers should fall on him and slay him for a wild beast, it was the supernatural sense of his own unworthiness, as compared with the justice of God, which had overflowed and overpowered the common-sense appreciation of proportion and probability. But while the Saints, some more, some less, have admitted of these poetic and often beautiful exaggerations in expression of feeling, they of all persons, are precise and exact in all annunciations that involve doctrine. Their only exaggerations are upon the beautiful axiom of St. Augustine and which will hardly bear an English translation: 'Aimez, et puis dites ce que vous voulez.'

splendours, 'A body thou hast fitted to me,'[1] then only do we trace the harmony of the whole scheme, and without any flowers of devotion we see the real place to assign to the Mother of God, because in a measure we see the place she has held from all eternity in the Divine Mind.

When God looked upon His creation, He saw that it was good. He saw the nine choirs in their light and beauty. He had seen them in their brief probation, when part accepted the great scheme of the Incarnation, and part turned from it with proud disdain. He counted their thinned ranks as Lucifer and his angels fell like lightning from Heaven; and He knew who among the still future race of man would ultimately fill their places. Even when the earth was without form and void, He saw the beauty He would call forth out of the chaotic mass, as in his inferior and human way, the sculptor sees the hidden god in the rough block of marble before him.

And as in the immensity of His love He deigned to desire that human nature by and

[1] Hebrews x. 5.

through which He was to unite Himself ineffably with His own creatures, He contemtemplated with unutterable complacency the only one mere human being who, after the fall, would ever perfectly in all things fulfil the antecedent will of God.

We are bound by theology to bear in mind the difference between what God wills and what He only permits. He willed the eternal happiness of all men, but He permitted the fall, because He left first to Adam, and to each of his sons for ever after, the use of their moral liberty; without which they could have had neither merit nor demerit, as both are derived from the motive and choosing of the act, be that act what it may. The antecedent will of God was that man should preserve his first state of grace. The fall once consummated, all men have taken birth in original sin; one only excepted. Mary escaped the effects of the fall by a special prerogative; and consequently she dates direct back into the antecedent will of God, which she never, either by the stain of sin at her birth or by actual sin throughout the entire course of her spotless life, in any degree contravened or disappointed. If we

dare to look at the idea of Mary as she lay in the infinite depths of the Divine Mind, long before creation, we shall see that she holds a quite exceptional place there, entirely distinct from that of the highest of God's saints, and of the greatest of prophets and apostles, because no one of these fulfilled (owing to the taint of original sin) that antecedent will of God which excludes the presence of evil. Mary alone has realised in her own person the original idea of the Divinity, before the free will of Adam had entailed concupiscence on each of his descendants, as the consequent result of his own sin. Mary is therefore the only mere creature of whom we can know *how* she dwelt and appeared, in the antecedent will of God. We see all others in the consequent will of God, because we see them under the taint of the fall. We are leaving out of this consideration the unfallen angels whose creation preceded that of man; and above all the Sacred Humanity of Our Blessed Lord, because He is God as well as man. We are speaking only of a daughter of Adam; she who is our sister in the order of nature, and our mother in the order of grace. Mary, therefore, alone of all creatures has fully

answered every purpose of her creation. She has never for a moment ceased to be entirely and perfectly what she was from the beginning intended to be, 'Sola sine exemplo placuisti Domino nostro.'[1] No transient act of her will ever came across the Divine will; and in this prescient contemplation of the world as it was to be, Mary, and the Sacred Humanity derived from her, were the two only objects on which the Divine eye rested with unbroken satisfaction. The rest has been marred, by the free will of man. And though raised by redemption into a higher state than that given to Adam at the time of his creation, and before the fall; still the fall, as it were, comes across the original idea like a bar sinister, and mars its first beauty—albeit Divine Love has found another and a greater beauty to take its place. The view which throughout this work we have taken of creation we believe to be indisputably the one which gives most honour to God. In other matters St. Thomas has been our guide; but in this question we have taken the Scotist theory of the creation and incarnation; and we believe that to be the one now most usually

[1] Officium Parvum.

held by modern theologians. It will be found to have the great merit of covering by far the larger area of theological questions, and of affording the more distinct sequence of appreciative definition. It is more consequent (as we venture to believe); and, which commends it most specially to our acceptance, it is the view which seems the most prominently to bring out the love of God in creation; while at the same time it defines the position of Mary with wonderful lucidity, and gives a completeness to the whole apparent scheme of creation and redemption, less evident in the Thomist view. The Incarnation always intended by the Divine Being as the reason of the creation, and the creation always intended to represent God as a Father; Mary, as affording the mode of the Incarnation, becomes a necessity from the first. Hence the greatness of her position, and the unparalleled dignity of her prerogatives, as well as the singularity of her graces; making her a hierarchy in herself, and putting her above every other point in the creation, always excepted the Sacred Humanity; which from Its hypostatic union with the Divinity, is out of the category of our present reflections.

The generation of the Word being God's coextensive knowledge of Himself: and the creation as a whole, and in its individual parts, lying in the knowledge and foreknowledge of Himself, it follows that the generation of the Word is the union of God with His creatures, not as a necessity in Himself, but as consequent upon His own creative act:—which creative act, followed by its ultimate intention, the Incarnation; and by its consequent intention, the Redemption, is the union of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity with the Church as the Spouse of Christ, and with each individual soul among the faithful according to their degree. '*We* will come to him and dwell with him.'

And if the generation of the Word is the creative principle whereby God made the world, so the procession of the Holy Ghost from Father and Son is the sanctifying principle whereby souls become one with Him in the closer bonds of faith and holiness.

Thus the whole history of the creation, of the Church of Christ, and of the individual soul, lies deeply rooted in the Blessed Trinity. The condition of the creation, and of man as its

lord, is not an arbitrary system arbitrarily imposed. It grows out of the very nature of God Himself. Not, as we have said before, that creation was a necessity with God. He might have abstained from creating. But it was as it were, a voluntary overflowing of His unutterable benevolence, in all things consistent with His divine nature, of which it is therefore a partial but altogether beautiful reflection and revelation. 'The invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are already seen, being understood by the things that are made.'[1]

He has mirrored Himself in His creatures. Each object in creation is a note of the universal harmony which lies in the Divine essence. It is not a part of the essence itself, as pantheism pretends; but it is the echo of the eternal Word embodied in matter, uttered by the Word, sustained by the Word, but absolutely distinct though never for one moment independent.

The key note to the harmony of creation is Mary. We do not say this as a flower of speech or a devotional phrase, but as a deep theologi-

[1] Romans i. 20.

cal and psychological fact. The reasons we have alleged before. She is the only being upon earth in whom the jar of original sin is not found. She is the only one who has never contravened the antecedent will of God. She came, as every soul does come, pure out of the Hands of her Creator; but by the same Hand she was preserved from the taint of evil which mysteriously and judicially attaches itself to each soul at the moment it becomes embodied in the polluted flesh of Adam. Moreover, besides the exigency of the case involved in her acceptance of the divine maternity as offered to her through the message of an angel, there is a moral beauty and fitness in this special privilege of remaining immaculate being attached to the new Eve, the mother of the new creation, the head and supreme representative of the reproducing and fertile half of the human race—that one only particular in which the female sex holds a superior prerogative over the nobler sex, the prerogative of bringing forth.

Thus the glory of creation in its innate beauty, and in its productiveness, culminates in Mary. She is 'the lily among thorns.'[1] She

[1] Canticles ii. 2.

is the essential type of womanhood, and of the reproductive principle as existing in God's holy creation. She is the great model and example of human life, because outwardly her life offered no exception to the ordinary existence of men. She was a wife and a mother, and dwelt among men as her Divine Son did after her. No palpable, evident miracles followed her course. She dwelt in no desert alone. She made for herself no reputation for working wonders and surmounting strange difficulties. Her life flowed on before the eyes of men, as a limpid stream; and any village maiden in Nazareth may have watched her as she carried water from the well, or spun the wool for her modest household; and seeing her purity and her sweetness, may have striven to resemble her. It is true the King's daughter is all glorious within; and God and the angels looked down into the depths of that sealed fountain that lay hidden from the eyes of men. But beyond a gently whispered rumour of her beauty and her grace, men detected nothing to make them fix on that one especial daughter of the house of David as the Mother of the Messiah. And yet that gentle heart and brain contained

all the infused knowledge of Adam before the fall, more latent science than any doctor upon earth, and a profounder knowledge of the secrets of God than the archangels.

We are all and each of us so impregnated with evil, we are so saturated with our own sins and the sins of those about us, that we fail to realise the sublime and exquisite beauty of daily life, with its round of ordinary occupations, as lived and performed by a perfectly pure and holy being. We have woven our passions into every act and every thought, we wake with their hot breath on our lips, we break bread with our sin-soiled hands, we hew wood and draw water in the covetousness of our nature; and the exquisite, tender, and pathetic beauty of ordinary daily life escapes our perception. If we would learn to see it, we must study Mary. He who did not abhor the virgin's womb will make the scales fall from our eyes, if we set ourselves quietly and deliberately to contemplate Her whom He chose to be His Mother. The dignity of life, which we are apt to miss in our graceless scuffle with ourselves and with others, will gradually dawn upon us. And that not as life

in the wilderness, not on the top of a pillar, nor yet in its glorious but exceptional phases as an apostle, as a martyr, or even as a confessor; but life in its most simple elements, its least striking developments, its least dazzling surroundings. Life, in short, as Mary lived it; and as Jesus chose it and fashioned it for His Mother, and thus fashioning it for her who is the culminating point of creation, He has sanctified life in the aspect that it offers to the multitude. He has made all things pure to those who live in purity. He has hidden himself behind the simplest accidents of life. 'He standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices.'[1] He has left a blessing on our daily path, like the perfume of hidden violets by the side of the dusty road. *Where* we seek him, *there* we shall find Him; for He is not far from every one of us, and He has given us His own pure and Virgin Mother to go hand in hand with us through the routine of existence. It all resumes itself in this, that simplicity and secrecy are strength, while multiplicity and

[1] Canticles ii. 9.

multifariousness are a loss of power as they are a loss of dignity. When God will reveal Himself to man, He hides Himself in the bosom of a virgin. When he would show us a perfect human being, He places her in an obscure village, and to men's eyes she betrays nothing extraordinary. All beginnings of great things are little. All beginnings of good things are simple. Nothing really great ever began by assuming a great name, or proclaiming its commencement with a flourish of trumpets. The largest rivers flow from the most hidden springs. We are still searching for the sources of the Nile! God's ways are the same always and everywhere. And they are a constant silent protest against the bustling vain-glory of men, against the hurry and scramble of our mode of life; our ill-tempered eagerness and indiscriminate hurry. A large, deep-drawn, wide-embracing hopefulness, and a steady uninterrupted but unhasteful effort, will alone convert nations and peoples, diminish the reign of evil, and translate into action our daily and hourly prayer, 'May Thy Kingdom come.'

Mary's life is the type and crown of this; and because it is so, therefore is she destined

to '*take root* in an honourable people.' A wilfully, intentionally, and morally hurried life, is not honourable. It is mean and degrading. It is not amongst such that Mary will take root. Activity is one thing; hurry is another. The former is consistent with the greatest peace and calm; the latter is the result of imperfection at least, and often of actual sin. We cannot think of the good angels as hurried; but we can, alas, constantly of ourselves, or of the devils. There is no calm, no silence, no peace in hell. What is impossible to the higher order of beings, ought daily to become less frequent with the children of their Queen, the sons and daughters of the Mother of Jesus.

When we have well impressed our hearts by the contemplation of the peace, purity, and simplicity of Mary; when by long dwelling on the beautiful image of her marvellous graces and qualities, we turn our eyes on ourselves, or on the world around us, it will be as when after long gazing at the sun, everything else is blurred and discoloured, as it were with great blood-stains. This illusion of the strained optical nerve in the natural world is a truth in

the moral world. The more we contemplate the 'woman clothed with the sun,' the more the flecks and flaws of all else will be evident to us; we discover them by abstracting ourselves from them, we learn to know their real nature by trying to forget them. And it is specially with a view to this clearer and truer vision that the study of the character and nature of the immaculate Mother of God is so full of profit. We shall only arrive at this by giving Mary her true place in creation; and we shall only learn what that true place is, by the blessing of God on earnest endeavours to penetrate and understand this great mystery. As it is the most wonderful expression of that great *principle* of God, namely that He makes Himself known by hidden and secret ways; so the more we penetrate it the more shall we come upon Him in sweet surprises, and beautiful, silent revelations. As we tread the labyrinth of Mary's graces and Mary's prerogatives, we shall find the beloved of our souls hidden there; we shall be lured on by the perfume of His unseen presence, till at length we light upon Him; for 'He is gone down into His garden to the bed of aromatical

spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.[1]'

Having traced Mary as far as we are able in the order of creation, let us proceed to trace her in the order of grace. In the first chapter we dwelt upon the various modes and forms by which God revealed Himself, in an obscure and imperfect way, to the Patriarchs and Saints of the Old Testament, through the medium of angels.

In the history of the old world we only obtain glimpses of the character of God; generally very dim, and often very terrible in their nature. We feel that He was sensibly further removed from the children of men then, than He has been since the first moment of the Incarnation; and that at once leads us to the consideration of the revelation of God as given us in the Incarnation itself, and consequently through Mary, who was the instrument and channel of the Incarnation. 'A body was fitted to Him,' and He 'did not abhor the Virgin's womb.' We turn, therefore, to this instrument and channel of the great act and stupendous event of the Incarnation, neces-

[1] Canticles vi. 1.

sarily expecting to find in the study thereof some revelation of the great God who chose Mary for so exalted a work. And in truth we find through Mary a positive revelation and unveiling of the three Persons of the ever blessed Trinity; each bearing a distinct character, and all uniting in a perfect harmony.

The Second Person of the Holy Trinity is the Son of the First Person, and of the First only; begotten in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. Mary, therefore, as the Mother of Jesus, who took flesh in her womb, is in a special sense the Spouse of God the Father, through the operation of God the Holy Ghost. The Sonship is derived from the Father, not from the Holy Ghost; while the effecting of the Incarnation was the work of the everlasting mutual love of the Father and the Son, which *is* the Holy Ghost, and which Love, in the Third Person, namely the Holy Ghost, overshadowed the immaculate and ever Virgin Mother. Mary conceived, not by any power of her own any more than she did so through natural means; but by the operation of God the Holy Ghost, who thus is partially revealed

to us, and for the first time, under the name of Holy Ghost, through the means of Mary.

But not less is Mary the means of a partial but equally distinct revelation to us of the First Person of the blessed Trinity. The voice from Heaven which said 'This is my beloved son,' was not the voice of the dove, and did not represent the voice of the Holy Ghost. It represented the voice of God the Father, owning the Son who had taken flesh in the womb of a virgin. We constantly allude to the way Mary brings us to Jesus; but we generally lose sight of the way in which Mary, in the mystery of her divine maternity, also shows us the Eternal Father. In the tenth chapter of Hebrews we find what we might almost be tempted to call a dramatic scene, and which is taken from the thirty-ninth Psalm. 'Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldest not; but a body thou hast fitted to me. Holocaust for sin did not please thee; then said I, behold I come; in the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will, O God.' It is thus that the Second Person addresses the First Person of the blessed Trinity, and alludes to His Incarnation in the

bosom of His earthly Mother. 'And,' says St. Paul, while commenting on the above, 'the Holy Ghost also doth testify this to us.' Thus we have the Three Persons, each separately and collectively, taking part in the great mystery. We have God the Father electing Mary to be the Mother of His Son in His assumed humanity, and we have the Son alluding to His Mother in these words: 'A body hast thou fitted to me.' In the Gospel account of the event we have the assertion of the angelic messenger to Mary, that the Holy Ghost should come upon her. And now we have St. Paul's comment on the event in the words 'the Holy Ghost also doth testify this to us.'

As creatures of time and sense, we are always most impressed by that which affects our senses by its vastness, majesty, and complication. This is natural and inevitable. Thus we lose ourselves in the contemplation of the creation of matter—the indefinite ages of its chaotic state, the first attracting and propelling pulsations of the two guiding forces of gravitation and repulsion, and the consequent developments of form, order and rotation, under the influences

of heat, electricity, and magnetism. It is ever stupendous, and still incomprehensible, spite of all that science is doing and may yet do to unveil the mystery.

And yet all this is but the porch and vestibule of the real temple of the divinity—the Incarnation—the '*Verbum caro factum est*'—the actual indwelling of God in the matter composing an infant's body; the One Person in the two natures, human and divine; and the Presence, by concomitance, of the Two other distinct Persons of the undivided Trinity. From that moment—so silent, so sudden, so little understood—the great fact of the eternal generation of the Son in the bosom of the Father, was carried on *in the Hypostatic Union*, in the bosom of Mary, during the period for ever to be remembered and full of secrecy and divine mystery, of nine months.

The eternal act of the eternal generation of the Word; that illimitable act which is of the very being of God, came as it were (and if we may so dare express ourselves) to a crisis in its everlasting existence. It assumed the appearance of a place in space; and though illimitable in its nature, it was enacted within the bosom of a mortal maiden.

It was for the bringing about of this act that the heavens and the earth were created. The first molecule of chaotic matter was the first adumbration of the stupendous act of the Incarnation; while the patience of God waited for His own appointed time.

How marvellous it seems to us, that that act for which the world as we know it, and all chaotic matter before the first chord was struck of the harmony of the spheres, had waited through possibly never-to-be-told ages, should at last fall as noiselessly as a flake of snow in the silent night! 'Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Saviour.' [1]

On how small and humble a theatre was it represented! Ages led up to it silently; and no less silently the stroke of time scarcely marked its coming; and then the ages flowed on silently as before. But the knot of a great mystery was tied which all eternity will never unravel or annihilate—the union of God with His creatures. And the scene was in a mountain cave at Bethlehem, and the dramatis personæ an aged man whose very presence was to increase the

[1] Isaias xlv. 15.

secrecy, and a young virgin who is the chosen instrument of the great act!

We turn, therefore, to Mary, the immediate channel of the stupendous event of the Incarnation. And it is, as we have seen, through her that we first obtain a distinct revelation of the Three Persons of the ever blessed Trinity. Mary is, as it were, the cause and occasion of that revelation. It was known before, but known dimly. In the first chapter of Genesis God said, 'Let us make man in our own image;' but the paternity of God the Father, the mission of God the Son, the operation of God the Holy Ghost—even down to His very name of Holy Ghost—is first made known to us in one vast flood of light and one torrent of portentous revelation, in connection with Mary. She is the golden gate which first opened to let in upon mankind this new vision of the great Trinity in Unity. The point of time had come when that Star of the morning was to usher in a new dawn of unknown brilliancy, when the Sun of Righteousness would arise with healing on His wings. A new book is opened, and at the head of it is written the Incarnation (Ps. xxxix). And Mary's 'Fiat' is the point from which this

springs. That is waited for; and instantly the mysteries of the Godhead, *as well as* the mysteries of the Incarnation, are opened out before us. Mary appears in the world; the long-looked for day has come; and, little as the world dreams of the quiet simple maiden in her silent home, she becomes the occasion of a depth of divine science being granted to man, at which the long ages of the past had only dimly guessed, and hardly even that! Thus the glory of the creation culminates in Mary, and we come as it were to a pause in the rapid flow of time. The stream has led us up to this point. But after this point all is new; more beautiful, more clear, more loving. The great God Himself reveals to us His new name of Holy Ghost through the message of His angel; and by the mission of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, we are able to look up with Mary to Him who sends, but is never sent—to the great God who chose Mary to be the Mother of His Son, while in her bosom the mystery of the hypostatic union was first consummated. The grace of God had been given to man from the moment of the creation. Adam, before the fall, was 'constituted' in a state of grace, not

merely in a state of innocent nature. Every holy prayer, every pious act, the divine inflatus of the Prophets, the faith and hope of mankind in the coming redemption, were each and all the promptings of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of men of good will. As a question of time, the mission of the Holy Ghost preceded the mission of the Son of God; but only as it were in under currents; filtering through hidden and obscure channels, though in a more direct way than the (other) anticipatory application of the benefits of the Redemption (amongst which these promptings and leadings of God's grace must be reckoned). But Mary is the point and object in creation which calls forth the first grand descent of the Holy Ghost upon herself, and that which occasions the revelation of His august name. The reason of this is, that the Holy Ghost—that is, the love of the Father and Son—is the medium (if we may use that term without seeming to derogate from His personality) by, and through which, God the Father chooses Mary to be the Mother of His Son; and by His 'overshadowing' is the hypostatic union of Godhead with manhood mysteriously effected.

'No man can come to me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him' (John vi. 44). Mary, by her grand and simple acquiescence that the Incarnation should be effected through her, is drawn by the Father through the Holy Ghost. Her heart springs upwards to the Son of God in the bosom of His Father, and by her pure aspiration on the announcement made to her from the Father by the angel, she draws Him down into her ardent heart through the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost.

Do not let us lose sight of the Presence and Action, separate and combined, of each Person of the ever blessed Trinity in this great transaction. The unity of action, the distinctness of person; the difference between the one sender (God the Father) and the two sent (the Son and the Holy Ghost); the marvellous propinquity and closeness which in this mystery is effected between Mary the child of man, and the First Person of the Trinity, through the operation of the Third, and in order that she may clothe with humanity the Second. These considerations throw such light upon the nature and goodness of God, do so much towards revealing to us the realities of Mary's position

in the scheme of redemption, and thereby give such dignity, such glory in the present, and such incalculable hope for the future to all our race, that we cannot take it to pieces too minutely, or contemplate it too extendedly. Whichever way we look at it, there is joy and peace to be drawn from it. There is refreshing dew on that fleece when the ground is parched and dry; and there is warmth and security there, when the ground is drenched with the night dews; for it is by this sign that God will save his people.'[1]

It has been maintained that Mary, though conceived without original sin, had the possibility of sinning in her nature—though she never actually did sin—until after her miraculous conception of the Son of God. But that the effecting of that great mystery took away, not the inclination which had never existed, but the power of doing wrong. However this may be in fact, the event must have so nearly approached to the Beatific Vision, which by its nature necessarily precludes from its recipient the possibility of committing sin, that it is not difficult to imagine it must have shared

[1] Judges vi.

in the same effects. The union of Mary with the three Persons of the blessed Trinity was, at that moment, as close as it was possible to be with a mere creature. It was short of the hypostatic union by the immeasurable distance that separates the finite from the infinite; the capacity of the creature from the capacity of the Creator. But it went to the utmost limit of the creature's comprehensiveness; and that of a creature single and special in her own nature, planned and devised for that one object; foretold from the earliest history of man in the third chapter of Genesis; and foreshadowed long antecedently to that, in the declaration which the Church's interpretation appropriates to our Lady: 'I was set up from eternity, and of old, before the earth was made.'[1]

A deep and continued meditation on this mystery opens out to us a vista of Mary's glories and prerogatives, that otherwise would seem to us, as we have said before, like pious exaggerations; and which would be exaggerations if this mystery did not take in all it does; and, if like a clear globe of crystal, it did not reflect the light on all sides. We miss the

[1] Prov. viii. 23.

spherical truth by missing any of its component parts; and thus we miss, as we shall proceed to develop in this work, the consolation to be derived from the fact that the whole system in which as Christians we live and are, is a supernatural system—that its roots lie in the nature of God Himself in His very essence; and that each stone of the edifice is, as it were, dug out of the abyss of God in His pure Being, and essential love. We are too apt to take up the mysteries of our faith as separate fragments of various beauty. We constantly look at them as apart from each other, as we might do the gems in a collector's cabinet. Some we think of as essential and pre-eminent, others as chiefly graceful and ornamental; among which, specially perhaps in the case of converts to the Catholic faith, we reckon the mysteries connected with our Lady. They appear to us to be adjuncts to our faith, aids to devotion; at the utmost permissions granted for the solace of our suffering hearts; mere condescensions of God towards our human weakness, that might otherwise be scared by the awfulness of subjects nearer the Godhead Itself. All this is an error, and an error at the very root of things.

We are not denying that the facts connected with Mary, and out of which our devotion to her springs, are sweet consolations and dear solace in our laborious life. They are this most certainly; but it is chiefly, if not solely, in virtue of their being more than this. They are essential to the divine plan. They date back into the nature of that plan, its first origin, its inalienable character, its ultimate intention. They are the cement and mortar of the whole edifice, and the absence of them is the missing link which separates heresy from orthodoxy. When we have realised them as such, we shall understand *why* we look to Mary as the channel of grace to our souls, and *why* we are consoled by appealing to her. She was the first appointed channel in the antecedent will of God; which will she has fulfilled. She cannot be less now than she was appointed to be from all eternity. She is in the plenitude of the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision; and there in the light of glory, she has us all present to her, seeing us in Him. Thus is she able to carry on her original prerogative and the object of her creation, namely by being the store-house of God's treasures, by whom God became man, and who is therefore

now, as she was then, the Tabernacle of Grace, the House of Gold, and the Ark of the Covenant. She is not *more* than she was, except in the sense in which all divine truth in the custody of the Church on earth increases, not in original truth, which is impossible, but in temporal development. She was always this: first, by anticipation in the Eternal Mind; then actually in time at the moment of the annunciation; and now progressively, as she 'takes root in an honourable people,' and in the ripeness of time spreads her branches, laden with fruit, over the children of God.

A prayerful study of the mysteries connected with the nature and office of the blessed Virgin, will not and cannot have the effect of dwindling in our minds those connected with our Lord. It seems a truism to say so, for how can a just appreciation of one truth mar a just appreciation of another truth? If we allude to this supposed objection, it is merely out of consideration for those outside the Church, into whose hands these pages may fall. Going deep into one divine mystery involves going deep into others; for they carry us on from one to all. A greater knowledge of

Mary, and about Mary, will entail inevitably a greater knowledge of her Divine Son. When we really know her, we shall know how transcendentally He is above her; by all the length of eternity, by all the depth and breadth of infinity, by all the stupendous distinction between God and his creature. We shall not rest solely in her arms, all loving and embracing as they are. But, raised by her, we shall fall into the Arms that were stretched on the cross for us. We shall not pause until we have laid our head on the bosom that was pierced for us; nor shall we be in any danger of confusing the immaculate heart of Mary with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the chosen fountain of the hypostatic union, however we may accidentally see them mingled together as a form of devotion: Because we shall know that God alone is our ultimate aim, we shall feel that Mary's heart pleads for us with the Sacred Heart, and that it is only in that wounded heart of His Son, that God the Father, our great source, our everlasting end can look down on us with complacency, and acknowledge us as His own. For not even the Sacred Humanity itself would satisfy any one of us,

were it not that he who loveth Him shall be loved of His Father;[1] and that *they*, the Three Persons of the blessed Trinity, will 'come to him, and make their abode with him.'[2] Not less than this, O! my God; all this, and this for all eternity, will satisfy the soul of Thy creature, whom Thou hast made for Thyself. Domine, noli tardere! Domine, noli tardere![3]

[1] John xiv. 21. [2] John xiv. 23.
[3] See Appendix, Note F.

CHAPTER III.

THE HIDDEN GOD REVEALED THROUGH THE CHURCH AND HIERARCHY.

THERE is one conclusion to be drawn from our preceding reflections almost too obvious to require naming. And yet it is the conclusion the most difficult of realisation to our human nature, because it is in one sense antagonistic to that nature in its fallen state. This conclusion is the conviction of how wonderfully near to us is the invisible Godhead; how close on the confines of our natural life lies the supernatural. Nay, more than this, how inextricably interwoven is one with the other; how entirely is the visible world permeated by the invisible.

Many causes combine to make this thought one of difficulty, and almost of repulsion. We have given our reasons for believing, in conformity with the Scotist view, that in the

original creation of matter the divine and primary intention of the Creator was to unite Himself with this His creation in the person of His Divine Son. When therefore Adam was created and placed in Paradise, he was constituted, not in a state of mere nature, but in a state of grace. There lay in his beautiful form, in his exquisitely-balanced faculties, in his harmonious senses, no natural antagonism to the world above him, to the supernatural world of which his pure nature was to become a recipient and a channel. The pressure of the supernatural played on his sympathetic organs with its intangible presence, as the notes of music play on our sense of hearing, waking in us speechless emotions full of delight, but beyond the reach of words. We cannot describe music, but we understand it. In like manner the supernatural world was beyond Adam, but it was not antagonistic or repulsive to him. According to his degree he could receive it, and be imbued and saturated by it. His senses were all open gates through which the supernatural could pour, without let or hindrance, till his soul was filled up to its highest

capacity, whatever that may have been. But for the fall, this would have been continued to his children; and matter, instead of presenting a barrier to the Divine Spirit, would have been an open course through which the spirit would have flowed perpetually. The barrier was raised by the fall. Then the tide of the supernatural retired, and matter became more material, and man sank down into the mud and mire of his present degraded state. The scheme of the redemption, and the law of recovered grace, is to work back, by a gradual process, all that man has lost; and even to raise him to a higher condition than any he would originally have attained. And one of the first effects of this scheme is, that it has brought the supernatural all about us again, and flooded the world with realities which transcend our senses. But there are two reasons which make this difficult for us to realise, and even repugnant to our feelings. First, the reason stated above—that we have become more material. And secondly, that the unseen world is of two parts, the good and divine, and the evil and diabolic. Our idle, sottish, brutish materialism, makes us recoil

from the touch of Uriel's spear—the keen, bright, glittering weapon of spiritual truth. But even what is good in us—remains of innocence, simplicity, and natural prudence—make us all shrink from the supernatural, because we are afraid of its darker side; and the two worlds being so far beyond our ken, we hide from both through fear of confusing them.

There is a vast difference in men on this one point. Some (and they are the few) have a hidden instinct for the unseen world. They feel they belong to it, as much as, and more than, to the world they see. There is a perpetual vibration in their souls which responds to the unheard music of the supernatural. To many of these may be reserved heights of sanctity or depths of iniquity; but these are not the multitude. They are the beautiful and dangerous exceptions. And it would perhaps be difficult to decide how far even their physical constitution may not be as a means to an end in producing this more facile connection with the supernatural or the preternatural.

But one thing is certain. The great object

of the scheme of redemption is to bring us again in harmony with the supernatural in its highest, best, and most divine sense.

It is the Spirit which quickeneth.[1] The union between spirit and matter must be again established and perfected, if we are to go on from grace to glory. And those will follow this path with most ease and rapidity who close at once with the fact that the supernatural lies at the bottom of everything; and that they have to accept that as the one great truth, and to recognise it always, and in all things. It is true the air is rarified on those heights, and difficult to breathe. The soft vapours of the valley suit us better. Our nerves shrink from the keenness of loftier regions. Our very flesh quivers at the touch of the supernatural. We hurry from its presence into the beaten paths; we listen, panting, for the human steps, and we lay eager trembling hands on our tangible surroundings, because of the Unseen which haunts us. Even an Apostle exclaimed before the mystery of a miracle, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful

[1] 2 Col. iii. 6.

man, O Lord;' and yet he was the chief of the Apostles, and the Rock on which, not long after, the great supernatural system which contains the salvation of the world was to be founded. Nay, the whole college of the Apostles, who had walked so long by the side of their Divine Master, when He came among them again in His risen body, 'were troubled and frightened because they supposed that they saw a spirit.'

It is true the day of Pentecost had not then come. The Holy Ghost had not descended on them in the plenitude of power, and baptised them with His fire. The supernatural edifice, whose external form, whose sole true channel and organ is the Catholic Church, was building but not completed. The Paraclete was still to be sent. But even since that second blessed mission—in which two Persons of the ever blessed Trinity, equally and together, send the Third Person to complete the edifice, and perfect the great scheme—the regenerate amongst men still cling to the sensible and tangible limits of their mere human nature. They fear to come forth into the bright efful-

gence of heaven, and walk by preference in the light of their own fires.

We are like moles. We have a glimmering of sight, adapted to groping in our own dark ways.

Therefore God treats us as mothers treat their children, or as we treat an invalid, by shading the light from eyes that in childhood or sickness are too weak to bear its brilliancy.

Thus everything in the order of grace is a condescension to our weakness. It comes to us wrapped up in a material and unpretending form, which is at once its vehicle and its organ.

The sacraments come to us in wheaten flour, in the juice of the grape, in oil and water; while other of our common household things become 'sacramentals,' and convey, under their familiar form, the supernatural which we cannot and dare not face. Wax and salt, and wood and ashes, become sacred beneath the touch of the anointed priest of God. Thus again, as ever, all matter clothes the supernatural, and betrays the presence of the God who hideth Himself. And as it is through certain material things that He shows forth the

treasures of His grace, and opens out stores of sanctity like fountains by the road side; so does He in His chosen ones represent to us Himself, and thus put it in our power through them the more easily and fearlessly to approach Him. 'Benedictus Dominus in sanctis suis.' But none so reveal Him as Mary. She gathers like a mirror the rays of divine light in one burning focus unto Herself. She carries the light, and yet she veils it. And if we would gradually learn to endure its brilliancy, and to ripen in its warmth, we shall best do so by frequenting Mary. The rays of God's light are refracted through her until they touch ourselves. And yet how few of us fully realise and understandingly perceive how the existence of Mary, the thought of Mary, the *great fact* of the Virgin Mother, has sanctified the whole world, and restored the lost crown of glory to creation.

Gently and gradually we may climb the greater heights, and bear the glowing light, if we hold on by her hand; and so in familiar ways, step by step, let the explanation of the mysteries grow out of the thought of the divine maternity. Divine truth and divine grace

are necessarily in themselves logical. There can be neither solecism nor contradiction in anything which pertains to the truth of God as it is in the Catholic Church. But it does not at all follow that each soul will hold its own personal possession of truth in a logical form. Individuals (and they will be the majority) will not see how one mystery necessarily grows out of another, nor how one portion of truth is the absolute correlative of the next, nor is it needful for salvation that this should be the case. But we venture to think it will be found that such souls as have been enabled to lay a firm hold on the fact of Mary, and on the necessary, absolute, and logical place she holds in creation, will have a wider range of vision, both in the reading of the past and in the hope of the future, than will readily be attained by those who have not acquired this blessed habit. She is the ladder of Jacob's dream, up and down which not only the angels pass to commune with man, but the sacred humanity Itself approaches us, and comes nearer and nearer, as we are able to bear His presence.

In the history of the creation we are told that 'the Spirit of God moved over the waters.' An

image of brooding and of fecundation is presented to us. We vaguely imagine the vast chaos of primeval matter—the darkness, and the face of the deep.

There is the liquid, and the solid, and the blackness. But there is no organisation or form of life; and we are yet far away from our beautiful universe. Then the Spirit of God moves over the waters, and form, and organism, and life commence.

Centuries shall elapse; the chaos has been fructified, and man peoples the globe.

There is beauty everywhere, life everywhere. But also sin and misery everywhere—though lighted up by a great hope and an ever-present expectation.

Yet once again the spirit of God shall brood and fecundate. In a hidden spot, in a point of time, in a deep silence the great event will take place; of which the first brooding was the preparation, the type, and the prelude. And to Mary, that ocean of sweetness and bitterness combined, it is said, 'The Most High shall overshadow thee.'

That ocean shall carry in its depths the divine Ichthius, and the creation shall serve as

a mantle at once revealing and concealing the Creator. The era of grace has begun; silent and more hidden than the natural era in its rise, and probably as slow and as gradual in its long and still future development. 'For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday which is past.'[1]

Having once adopted secrecy and hiddenness as the necessity of His presence, or rather (for He is above all necessity, and can act as He will) as a great and chief condition and characteristic of His presence, we shall find the hiddenness and the thick darkness increasing, as the new era develops itself to the eye of faith.

The Infant God passes into the Eucharistic God; and none can believe in the last who have not realised the first. We seem in this great mystery to have reached the uttermost limit of hiddenness, while as a necessary consequence we touch closer upon the Godhead. We have found Him in the most blessed Sacrament of the altar; and found Him in the annihilation of all our preconceived impressions and natural

[1] Psalm lxxxix. 4.

perceptions. We have stepped over the last limits of the natural, and are face to face with the everlasting supernatural, in an ever-standing miracle.

At once the whole world is transformed to us. Everything radiates from that one Great Presence, the Eucharistic Presence, and again flows up to it. It is the mystery which is the clue to all others; probably, nay most certainly, in a way and to a degree of which at present even the greatest Christian philosophers have but little perception, while others are wide away from this narrow gate of truth. If ever it be permitted to us to know more of the mode in which Jesus dwells in the Sacramental species, and in what manner His presence acts upon, transcends, or puts aside the laws of matter, it will be then that we shall have obtained the full knowledge of those laws in all their bearings. The solving of that mystery will be the explanation of every other in connection with matter. The great questions of substance, extension, space, and forces, will have found their solution; and already the study of dynamics leads the Catholic nearer to the conclusion that the doctrine of transub-

stantiation contains the secret of them all, and is in itself the key that unlocks the hidden mines of natural research. We shall therefore make a surer and speedier progress in science if we put ever before us the great truth that the supernatural holds the key to all real knowledge. A profound faith in the revealed law of grace will facilitate our enquiries into the laws of the material world. For wherever the Blessed Sacrament comes there takes place the same marvellous transcendence and subjugation of the laws of matter.

The world was made for the Eucharistic Presence, as being the supreme gift of God to man, in which He gives no less than Himself, in the Second Person of the Trinity—soul, body, and divinity—whole and entire. The other sacraments are modes conveying the substance in portion and degree. This sacrament is itself the whole substance, perfect and entire. It is the direct touch of God upon the soul, the contact of the Creator with His creature in a more intimate way than is possible between one creature and another. God alone could thus come to us, and thus coming, He leaves His mark upon the soul; not in a general way,

but mark upon mark, time after time. And the mark is indelible—indelible in heaven, where it will be brought out in full effulgence in the light of glory; and indelible in hell, where it will be burned in by penal fires. For God could not touch His creature, and that touch be effaced, throughout eternity.

In God's own good time we shall learn how all matter and its laws were framed for that end, namely, the Eucharistic Presence, and exist in such manner as to make possible that great consummation which is the ultimate reason of their own being.

This may sound a bold assertion: yet it can be no more than the truth. Given the fact that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, was to take flesh in the womb of Mary, and to become our food in the form of bread, and thus to unite Himself to His creatures in an ineffable manner, it becomes obvious that the entire cosmos must have been fashioned with the direct and distinct object of bringing about this great mystery. And that too, in a more special and supreme way than we believe the Creator to have pre-ordained throughout the creation, each cause to its consequence.

Once more all is as it is, because He is what He is. And when we shall know more of what we call natural science, then we shall also know more of the supernatural, which is its substratum—'that from invisible things, visible things might be made.'[1]

It is a joy and a triumph to the Catholic to know that he holds the key to all science in the dogmas of the Church. There may be many wards of that key which have not yet been turned in the mysterious locks. We bide our time. Not only can we undisturbed watch the surging waves of human thought rolling around us, and too often casting up but mire and rubbish, but we can even rejoice at these evidences of the great thirst of man's restless heart after knowledge. Some quota of truth lies at the base of most, if not all. Chinks are made through which the daylight may penetrate. Truth is even more often arrived at by finding out what it is not than by discovering what it is. We work backwards through negation; often as securely, and more so, than we press forward by speculation.

Whatever theories arise, let us despise none

[1] Hebrews xi. 3.

loudly or rashly; neither let us clamour for any till time has tried its worth. We can afford to wait in a passionless and assured patience, until science gives her testimony fuller and stronger, in the way in which the Catholic knows beforehand she must and will give it.

He who hath given us our Eucharistic God, 'il Dio Sacramentato,' shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?

When we reach the light of glory we shall see in Him how all things exist—their essence, their species, and their accidents. The marvellous fitness of creation to be His garment and His throne will be clear to us, and how they derive their nature from Him who is pure Being—the 'Qui Est.'

But though we cannot here 'know as we are known,' yet we may arrive at the solution of many now obscure questions if we will take faith for our guide, and revealed truth for the open gate of science. Until then we are trying to 'climb up some other way,' and we are placed in danger of losing ourselves in pitfalls of uncertainty. To the loving and believing heart it easily becomes obvious that in the

sacrament of the altar lies the secret, or all the secrets, of all creation. It is the lowest depth of His own creation into which the Divine Creator has let Himself down by the golden chain of His divine scheme of creation and redemption. And (to reverse the figure of speech, from the lowest depth to the greatest height) there it is that the creative mystery culminates. It is the pivot round which, for everlasting ages, all else turns. It is the centre of attraction, the ruling sun, and the nucleus of the universe. It is the marriage of the laws of nature and of grace; the ultimate mystery of the concealment of the Second Person of the Trinity behind the phenomena of His own creation, whose appearances and accidents He thereby assumes; thus hiding Himself to our senses while He reveals Himself to our faith. We do not see it so now. We only know it, and dimly feel it. But the ages are before us; and in their course, perhaps sooner, perhaps later, the mystery will unravel itself more and more. 'Adveniat regnum tuum!'

When the worshipper lifts his eyes to the Host in the hands of the priest at the elevation, he looks upon the seal of divine secrecy. For

he sees Jesus in the form of bread, while by concomitance the First and Third Persons of the Blessed Trinity are also present; the Three Persons being essentially inseparable. When he gazes at the Host in the monstrance at Benediction, he is really contemplating the King on His throne; really and truly the throne that He has created for Himself in such guise that we who are His brethren may dare to look and adore. Every new altar that is raised is an instance of Jesus taking possession of His earthly kingdom, that had been lost to Him by the fall of man. Step by step he gains upon the powers of darkness; and in hiddenness and mystery comes to claim His own.

How much remains to be done! What vast tracts of creation have not yet been subdued to that beloved Silent Presence, and even where He reigns, how few of us realise the immensity of the boon, and the wonder-working graces and deep wisdom that flow from the Eucharistic Throne.

Let us try to believe more, and above all, while believing, also to *expect* more. 'Dilata os tuum et implebo illud.'

We have not drained dry the overflowing

promises given to large faith. And we too often forget the constant cry of Our Lord while upon earth, 'Modicæ fidei! Modicæ fidei!' It is our faith that is wanting for the work to be carried on. Each act of faith is a stone in the edifice; and the Great Architect waits for us to bring the stones that He may complete the temple of His Glory, where He will reign when His Kingdom is established over all. 'Adveniat regnum Tuum' is our more than daily prayer. But our faith is small, and our hope too often at a low ebb. We measure the history of creation by our own span of life, and because so much remains to be fulfilled we begin to despair of any great future good.

There are perhaps few greater stumbling-blocks to a thoughtful mind, with incomplete faith, than what, if we may so express it, we should call the favouritisms of the Creator. The choice of the Jews as his own peculiar people; the choice of individual souls as His privileged saints; these might be understood as arising from causes comprehensible to our reason if only we were cognisant of them. But the choice of particular places as special fountains of grace, and seats of miraculous inter-

position, appears less easy of explanation or comprehension. The unbeliever and the materialist sweep away the whole difficulty, like a cobweb, with the word superstition. But to the Catholic, and to those who have derived certain assured benefits in particular localities, this is not an answer. The difficulty would at first sight seem to be increased by the prevalence in pagan times and in heathen lands, of a like selection of places, and especially of wells and springs, for the mysteries of a false and diabolic worship. It is evident that 'le singe de Dieu,' the evil one, has in everything endeavoured to travesty divine truth; and this form might present itself to him as one of the easiest of imitation. Nor will the fact that he antedated his copy of God's dealings with His people be any argument against it; because the cases of diabolical possession were a thousandfold more frequent before the Incarnation, of which they are the devil's rendering, than they have been since.

There can be no doubt that Lucifer, the Bearer of Light, must have had a knowledge of the mind of God probably transcending that

of all mankind, at least of all outside God's chosen people, and before the coming of Christ. This might enable him to act upon certain general principles, which suggested to him practices the key to which we now possess in what revelation has taught us. From the depths of his science as an archangel, before his fall, he must have had a vast speculative as also a personal acquaintance with the characteristics of the Divine Being. And thus he was enabled to foreshadow facts and states involved in the Incarnation, or depending from it. As prince of this world few mysteries would come more easily to his hand than the mystery of God's selection of particular localities. And the fact that he did select them for his own evil oracles is no argument against the truth that the loving care of the Creator does the same for our greater benefit.

We are driven to use mere human words when we talk of the unapproachable God, and thus we cannot otherwise express our meaning than by calling this the favouritism of God; while we think we see in it a fuller and further development of His mysterious mode of laying

claim to 'the earth and the fulness thereof' as His very own to do with as He wills. There is a beautiful tradition—no more than a tradition—that during the forty days Our Lord spent on earth before His ascension, He traversed the whole surface of the globe: and that His blessed feet rested on every spot where hereafter His altars should be erected. Did he linger, too in the valleys and on the mountain heights where He intended that His blessed Mother should, in the fulness of her dealing with men, give her name to a salubrious fountain, or reveal her loveliness to some saintly child untaught by the world's wisdom?

We cannot touch on these themes without having again and again to apologise for the weakness and inadequacy of words. And we are of course more absolutely reduced to common parlance as we touch closer upon those points where the divine actions come nearest in appearance to our human actions. This is the case in this question of what we have ventured to name the divine favouritism, and it is still more so in what we must be allowed to express as the touching and marvellous

evidences of what we men call humour, in the creation.

No one with a sense of it in themselves, and any powers of observation, can have failed to detect it for instance, in the looks, the ways, and the habits of animals. The mute gaze and absurd grace of our dog, who is only beautiful and comical and not at all practically useful, and the quaint manners of a pair of birds, might draw tears of tenderness to one's eyes as one looks upon these companions of solitude, and watches the touching evidences of that quality of humour in the Divine Being, without some touch of which in human nature no character is perfectly loveable, and no talents are of the high order which trench upon genius.

Has He not said, 'I will draw them with the cords of Adam;'[1] and does not all this bring the Ineffable very near to us? When once our eyes are opened to this great fact we shall see how everything combines to tighten those cords, and make us detect God everywhere. Till then the outside world is to us either an unmeaning husk, the sweet kernel of which we

[1] Osee xi. 4.

shall never taste; or it is an enigma as it was to the pagan of old; full of contradictions and teeming with horror. There is a third aspect; but as it belongs only to extreme youth, and to the heart unseared by sorrow, why should we allude to it? To these the world is a pleasure-garden; the first storm will sweep away the flowers. Then comes the danger of dwelling only in platitudes and externals, and, even though partially illumined by faith, of carrying our light in a dark lantern, and so missing the glow and the warmth which a diffused sense of the presence of the hidden God all around us imparts to our sojourn here. By withdrawing our eyes from the supernatural we have grown too short-sighted to discern the vast powers of grace lying hidden but certain, behind the veil. With the fretfulness of our hurried existence we think but little done, and no time left to do much more. We shut up the book of hope and expectation as a tale that is told, and because the days are still evil, we doubt that much more will come of it. Poor feeble creatures of time, we measure our impatience against Him Who has the habit of eternity; and we dare to apprehend that what works so slowly will

hardly fulfil all it began by promising 'Modicæ fidei!'

'There shall be one day which is known to the Lord, not day nor night; and in the time of the evening there shall be light. And it shall come to pass in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord and His name shall be One.'[1]

Having thus found in the most blessed Eucharist the ultimatum of God's hiddenness in His own creation, we shall be better prepared to trace Him in other channels, and to recognise Him in the world of grace and in the world of nature. 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' He is everywhere, and all belongs to Him. But at the same time He has chosen certain people, places, and facts to exhibit more especially the evidences of His presence. We have already alluded to Mary as first among all creatures, for the most perfect and unsullied instance of God revealing Himself to man (short of the hypostatic union). Each of

[1] Zacharias, xiv. 7, 8, 9.

His Saints, whether those of the Old Testament or those canonised by the Church, or those, many as the stars of the firmament, whose names have scarcely been heard beyond the walls of their own dwelling, but who have kept their light, which is in truth His light, burning brightly through their quiet course; these have all testified of Him, and have won back to His dominion some point, or corner, some heart or life of the alienated world. There are diversities of graces but the same Spirit.[1] Nothing in God's world, either of matter or of spirit, is identical. The nature may be the same, but with a difference. The variety is as various as the individual. The sameness is in the source, the same God who worketh all in all.[2]

This is one of the reasons why we overlook in the spiritual states of those around us, so many of God's operations, and fail so often to recognise His hand. We acknowledge His work in some virtue that takes our imagination, meets our own wants, or elicits our sympathy. But another grace is thriving luxuriantly in another soil, and does not arrest our attention.

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 4. [2] 1 Cor. vi.

One soul bears the cross in heroic silence, and we suppose it arises from want of feeling. A perennial cheerfulness in another charms us, but we conclude it is an accident of health and temperament. A rugged exterior hides a well of tenderness, and we are offended by the first; while the angels are pouring the floods of the last in intercessory prayer on the flames of purgatory, and graces are radiating from Mary's outstretched hands on countless sinners, because of the prevailing tears shed in secret by that seemingly rough nature which displeases us. Hence arise our rash judgments, our imperfect appreciations, and the readiness with which we take scandal at the conduct of those whose hearts the little plumb-lines of our investigations are quite inadequate to fathom.

We have seen how, in the byegone ages of time, first the patriarchs, then His chosen Israel, and the prophets, were the avowed channels of His grace and the special revelations of His presence.

We have seen these facts, these people, these histories, like diverse streams flowing into one vast river which is the Church of God, and emptying its rushing waters into the boundless ocean

of God's love to all eternity. If our reflections have taught us anything, they have taught us to look for God in very hidden and simple paths; they have taught us not to despise little things, and they must also teach us not to be scandalised at the 'earthen vessels' into which He condescends to pour His graces. The streams flow on into the great river, and some pass through one soil, some through another; one is laden with sand, another bears on its course the marl and gravel of its own banks. But the waters of the great river of God remain pure; and thus the infirmities, nay even the crimes and errors of her servants cannot mar the beauty of the Church, which is the bride of Christ.

The inner spiritual sense of the children of God will enable them to find Him whom their soul loveth, in all His appointments, no matter how covered over by the faults or frailties of man. Nothing can conceal the beauty of the Church to the clear eye of faith.

And if, often it may be, the sins of men are allowed to mar its aspect, this is permitted partly that, by its continuity and persistent progressiveness it may the more make manifest its divine origin.

The sacraments are no less the sacraments in their full efficacy, though, may be, the priest who administers them is in mortal sin. The chair of Peter confers no less divine power and grace, though some Popes have hardly been virtuous men. The Vicar of Christ is still the completion and carrying on of His divine Master's life upon earth. The homage we pay to him is paid to our blessed Lord in his person, in the same sense, though a still higher one, that our Lord Himself has said of the works of charity done in favour of His poor, 'inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me.' The earthly-minded are scandalised by this, because it needs the eye of faith to separate the thing divinely intended from the thing humanly evident. It is an act of the mind which requires either the simplicity of innocent children or the far-reaching perceptions of the spiritual sense, as faith and prayer alone develop them. It is in a great measure the fruit of that charity which 'hopeth all things, and thinketh no evil,' and which, being the product of the Spirit of Light, enables us to see beyond the veil.

The saints—men and women whose eminent

characteristic is a horror of sin—are precisely those who have the greatest faculty for seeing the supernatural good, behind and beneath the covering of human infirmity. And on the contrary the neophyte in virtue, and the young convert in faith, are those who stumble on the threshold, and who, taking scandal at everything, frequently end in losing their own souls.

In the spiritual life, love and knowledge are kindred terms. The more we know the more shall we love; God first, and then His Church as the bride of Christ, and each member of the Church as united to Him. So also the more we grow in love the deeper will become our insight, or in other words, our knowledge, until we come to the light of glory, when we 'shall know even as we are known.'[1]

There is a certain very deep and awful sense in which God entrusts not only His graces, but Himself to us; leaving it in our power, unhindered, to abuse our sacred possession, and turn light into darkness and sweet into bitter. We allude not only to the desecration of the sacraments, or their profanation, but also

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

to all other and secondary spiritual powers which He confers on us. Art, science, and the so-called civilisation and progress of modern times, owe their growth in an inalienable manner to powers, and we may say to graces, which Christianity alone has conferred. And yet each one of these has from time to time thrown out phenomena antagonistic to the Church; and even in a broader sense, to Christianity. It is as when the manna in the hands of the Israelites bred worms. They appear something more than abuses; they look like the natural offspring of a very different parent; and, unlike the children of Saturn devoured by their father, it is they who tear their own mother's entrails.

It is this which forms to a thoughtful mind, the peculiar trial of the present day. It tests our faith more than aught else; it leads to the looking for new Christs. Or it tempts us to harden our hearts against hope and faith, while in despair we exclaim, 'We hoped that it was He that should have redeemed Israel.'

It is remarkable that while physical science is a direct growth of Christian philosophy, and was comparatively unknown to antiquity, it

especially threatens to become like a pernicious and parasitical over-growth, destroying and strangling the tree, as the ivy does the oak of the forest. These things seem so. We know they are not so in reality; and that 'the end is not yet.' We know it partly by past experience; having even in our brief day seen theories that rose suddenly threatening to overwhelm revelation, long ago sunk into comparative oblivion and superseded by others. But we know it most of all by the exercise of faith. And without that exercise growing more and stronger, we might be tempted to follow after the 'Go there, see here' of uncertain teachings. We have need to repeat to ourselves and others, 'I know in whom I have believed.' And few things will aid us more in this exercise of faith than the frank admission that the sword of the spirit is put into merely human hands, and may be made to give wounds for which its trenchant blade was never intended. Nevertheless it is ever the same divine Spirit, the same wonderful gifts conferred upon erring man which he may use for his salvation, or to his destruction, as he cleaves his way through the mysteries of

science, or through the serried ranks of his spiritual foes.

The secret of God's dealings with His creature is in the leaving him the exercise of his own free will. In the terror and horror of what we find in ourselves we could almost cry to Him to take it from us. We could venture to wish Him, if we may use the expression, less delicately reserved upon that point; and we long to ask Him to put forth His strength and prevent us. Alas! the least touch of that strength would be annihilation to our poor nature; and at once all merit, or possibility of meriting, would desert us. We *cannot* do anything without Him, and He *will* not work without us. We may still steal fire from Heaven to our own destruction, and use our most insatiable powers in pulling down the temple on our own heads, if so we will.

Well may we shudder at the possibilities before us, and the havoc that man may make with God's own gifts. And as we look into the untold depths of our souls we may implore Him, not for limitation of our freedom—that may never be—but that out of His unupbraid-

ing liberality [1] He may enrich us to the utmost limits of efficacious grace.

Meanwhile the course of events flows on. Graces are put into the hands, not of angels, but of men. The sacred and undying deposit (for no grace is ever lost in the divine economy, though the individual soul may lose it, so far as its own profit goes,) passes through what we call accidents, and no miraculous disrupture of natural law intervenes to limit our power of doing evil with the very material given us to work good. We must bear in mind that the larger the area covered by grace, the greater the possibility of its abuse and desecration. The saints will always be few in comparison with the saved; but in a certain sense, not intended to underrate the enormous value of eminent individual sanctity, the great point is that the multitude, 'such as no man can number,' should pass within the gates of Heaven at last.

Meanwhile we must bear in mind a truth known to us all, but which in moments of discouragement we are apt to forget, namely

[1] 'He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.'

that grace, like Him who gives it, is very hidden and very silent; while evil is loud and rampant. We see nearly all the evil; we do not behold one thousandth part of the good.

The saints were not free from infirmity; and we might perhaps in individual cases have thought lightly of their sanctity, had we judged them only by what our infirm perceptions permitted us to discriminate. Yet the last hour found them having filled up the measure of their merits, ready to receive the crown; and while we might have taken offence at what we thought imperfections, they were still on the way to that glorious ending. It all comes round to the same axiom, namely that the supernatural is everywhere, but is concealed; and that the supernatural is the only true measure of what we see around us, while its undeveloped capabilities and occult powers lie deeper and wider than we can measure. What we see is but the earnest of what may yet be revealed. We live amid foreshadowings. The full realisation is to come, or rather is coming. But in this world, except in rapt moments of mental prayer, we have no standing-point from whence to survey, and as

it were, take a bird's eye view of the whole effect. Through life we are like people walking in a crowd. We see the faces nearest to us, the sky above us, the ground just beneath our footsteps, and the outline of the far-distant hills. Sometimes in the surging of the multitude, we catch a brief glimpse of fair lands in advance; peopled with other beings than ourselves in more radiant garments. But the dust of our own footsteps blinds our eyes, or the prospect is closed in by the throng among whom we are one.

This is life, and this is our view of life. But this is not all that the angels see. Still less is it all that He who sits on His sacramental throne beholds with the eyes of divine love. 'There is a perfect day,' somewhere among those faint hues in the far-off horizon—far off to us, but more present to Him than is the very moment in which my hand traces these words of trembling expectation.

There is a new heaven and a new earth, which is the upward growth of this, the breaking forth and efflorescence of the hiddenness of Him, Who will draw all things to Himself. Oh Divine Master! Spouse of my

poor awe-struck soul, there are moments when the closed silken curtains draw aside, and the tabernacle doors open noiselessly. And it is not only the hidden God concealed beneath the white half transparent accidents that dwells there. But it is the King of Glory who has conquered death, and darkness, and evil; and Who comes to reign over the world He made, and lost, and has slowly, oh so slowly, regained. Other sheep He has who are not of this fold; them also must He bring, that there may be one fold and one Shepherd; myriads and myriads of worlds that He will string together with his love, like the beads of a rosary. There will be link within link, and there will be no more sea—the emblem of separation. The countless multitude of the stars will be the many mansions of His Father's house filled with 'bodies terrestrial and bodies celestial,' who adore one Creator. Then shall 'He deliver up the kingdom to God and the Father,' and 'He Himself shall,' in His sacred humanity, 'be subject unto Him who had put all things under His feet, that God may be all in all.'[1] Oh, my Beloved, we are still far

[1] 1 Cor. xv.

away from the glorious realisation of that vision. But yet all the materials are here. The Infant God has been. The Eucharistic God is. And the Conqueror goes on to conquer.

Ages upon ages may yet elapse; but each lies in the lap of eternity, and nothing is lost that has been or shall be. Death is never annihilation, and God has made nothing in vain. When I think of my littleness, I feel as if I might be lost—as the tiny grains of sand slip through the closed fingers of the hand that fain would detain them. But this can never be. I shall not die, but live. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou most mighty; with Thy comeliness and beauty proceed prosperously and reign. And when Thou numberest the captives of Thy love that follow the wheels of Thy chariot, among the least of Thy slaves, and the last of Thy victims, dear Lord, remember me!

Then will come that end for which we are all thirsting—some knowingly, some only with the simple and trusting unconsciousness of children. Few of us have tried to realise how stupendous that end is, how far it transcends

anything that we are in the habit of clothing in words, even in the words of prayer.

Did Philip in the least know how much he was uttering, when with his eyes still partially closed to Him who alone is the way, he gave out that cry of all creation, 'Lord, show us the Father.' That is what we are pining for; that and no other, and no less, O my dear God! to look upon Thy face, and see Thee as Thou art, without even the dear veil of the sacred humanity which alone has led us up to this glorious and final consummation.

Perhaps, as time goes on, the Church may herself give a greater outward predominance to that which is her first, her last, her crowning feast—Trinity Sunday.

Yet possibly the thought is, as a rule, too vast and too complete for our fragmentary life. But (whether or no we can grasp the idea) everything leads up to that.

The agony of Good Friday, the joy of Easter Sunday, the glory of Ascension Thursday, the plenitude of Pentecost, all culminate in the deep unbroken calm and completeness of Trinity Sunday—Heaven's own Feast, the Feast of the Triune God.

Perhaps for ever in this life our devotion will be like that beautiful canticle which of all others seems most to express the mind and sentiment of the Church—the 'Te Deum:' and which beginning with the triumphant adoration of God simply as God, falls into all the pathos and plaintive pleading of the Passion, like a triumphal march ending in a minor key. A special devotion to the Trinity will probably be more the devotion of the Church triumphant than of the Church militant. There are deep reasons for this; and indeed it seems a practical necessity that it should be so. It is true here and there God has raised up a few saints whose peculiar devotion has been to the oldest and greatest of all mysteries—the mystery of the Trinity, which is the mystery of the Godhead. And there have been women among them. This is what we know. If we knew more, we should probably find it far more fully developed among the canonised saints than their biographers generally tell us. Saint Teresa's writings prove it by more than implication, while in some it has been testified by miracles. We venture to think it was the special devotion of St. Paul, and is betrayed in his epistle to the Hebrews.

This would seem only natural. He is writing to his brethren, and there is an intimacy—and, if we may use the term—a consanguinity of style in this epistle, greater than in any other of his.

It is the first mystery, the mystery of the old law. They had been born and bred in it. The stamp of it had made them God's peculiar people. Unlike the converted pagans, their intellectual and mental habits had all been formed upon it. It was natural that in his communications with them St. Paul should betray the bent of his mind, which was in harmony with his own antecedents and with theirs. They had ever been the worshippers of the One God. That at least was no new dogma to them. And in no part of the New Testament do the mysteries of the scheme of redemption so gloriously and so lucidly lead up to the Trinity in Unity, as in the epistle of St. Paul, the converted Jew, to his fellow-converts. The result is a grandeur of diction, a massiveness of argument, and a profound depth of wide embracing faith, which seems to blend the sublimity of Sinai with the pathos of Calvary; while the thunders of the one find their echo in the last sigh of Him, who, dying on the cross,

abrogated the sentence of the old law that He might 'reveal to us the Father.'[1]

'There are diversities of operations, but the same God who worketh all in all.'[2] And it is by those operations, severally dispensed, some here, some there, in greater or lesser degree, that God writes the history of His Church and the growth of her developments.

Each individual soul that yields itself in docility to the leadings of God's Spirit, prepares a stone for the edifice which shall be laid by the great architect in this place or in that, according to His own design. And so in time the various devotions of the Church grow and expand. Her inner spiritual history might well be written from them alone. For though they all start from one base some rise higher and spread wider than others; and this at different times. It is 'the Spirit who asketh for the Saints according to God.' Thus God leads on His Church with His own hand. Let each be faithful in following that lead; thinking nothing of himself, and yielding like a child. If we were more simple, maybe the most ancient and the

[1] Matt. xi. 27. [2] 1 Cor. xii. 6.

deepest mysteries would throw their broad light over our soul in a flood of joy.

This thought leads us back to our first chapter, and to the simple contemplation of God as our Creator. May He impress His own image on each of us as best pleases Him! Let Him have His own way with us all. It is not for us to choose, still less to resist. We shall each receive according to our measure if we bring Him our hearts in our hand, emptied of the things of this world, that He may fill them with divine truth. Our just appreciation of things will be in proportion as we realise the divine intention, the divine presence, and the divine action. This is the wisdom that is of God; and it is in direct opposition to the wisdom of the world. It transcends our reasoning calculations, it repudiates our social conventionalities. It puts aside human respect, and emancipates the soul from all terror of the judgments of men. It confers the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free. It is our sublime and inalienable inheritance, if only we be bold enough to claim it. It sets the soul more free from the workings of self-love than the severest austerities. It

couches the eyes of the blind, and renews our youth like the eagle's. We know and feel ourselves ranged on God's side, though all the world be against us. It is soon lost, for it is a fragile treasure in a fragile vessel. One slight sacrifice to public opinion, one half bending of the knee in the courts of Baal, one grain of incense burnt to Cæsar, may darken the light in our souls for many a long and dreary hour through which we try to grope our way back to the light of heaven. It is more delicate than the bloom on the ripe fruit, more evanescent than the fleecy cloud in the red glory of morning, if once we expose it to the scorching fires of earth. It is a stumbling-block to many; to the Greeks it is foolishness; for it is the sublime and transcendent 'Folly of the Cross.'

There is an infirmity, already alluded to, and to which many excellent persons are subject. It is never a proof of mental depth or breadth. It is seldom a proof (though we might be tempted to think so) of strength of religious principle. We allude to the habit of easily taking scandal. It arises from the practice of judging exclusively by what we see, and not

allowing for the hidden and the supernatural. It is the old evil of measuring all by our sensible perceptions, and so narrowing the world down to our own point of view. We think we trace abuses everywhere; and we are fired with the desire to radically alter a system which admits of such abuse. We detect the cockle among the wheat, and are anxious to weed it out, at the risk of rooting up the wheat with it.

By an ethical sequence not difficult to unravel, these same persons are generally those who are most on their guard against the encroachments of the supernatural. They are for shutting the door against its inroads lest it should trench upon what, to their idea, does not come within its province. They have their own views, generally narrow ones, as to what ought to be God's sphere in His own world, and the limits of where (seeing they hold that the creation is given over to man and belongs to him) He should abstain from putting in a claim. These are the people who wish religion separated from politics, and think the Papacy would be better without the temporal power. They object to the blending of the earthly and

the divine; not seeing that the original intention of the former was simply to be the vehicle of the latter, and that whether we take the lily of the field, or the pomp of kings, these things only are because God is; and that He has caused them to exist for His own intentions and for the ultimate revelation of Himself, through the hidden ways He has chosen to create for that purpose. How far in the long lapse of time He will gather all things unto Himself before the end comes, we cannot tell. How complete will be the evident and uncontroverted triumph of good over evil, and the sensible indwelling of the Spirit in all outward things, it is not for us even to surmise. Whether the final blast of the trumpet, calling the world to judgment, will break in upon the rapid though gradual victories of the Word made flesh, while vast portions of His own creation have not yet owned His sway, is left untold. We know that He will come as a thief in the night, and that could not be if all had their lamps trimmed and were watching for Him.

As at His first advent He will come to many of those calling themselves His, who will not

recognise their Lord. But He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet.[1]

Happy they who stand with open hearts waiting for their Lord; and whose one joy upon earth is to see the encroachments of the divine system coming in upon the shores of our lives, like the gradual but irresistible ocean-tide!

But while we blame in principle anything like a niggardly denying of our Lord's right to take possession of everything in the outer world, and appropriate it to the service and adornment of His Bride the Church, we are bound to be gentle to individual opinions in individual instances. It is not for us to decide what He may choose, and what reject of the things He has made. We cannot conclude absolutely that this or that will or will not be for the good of the Church and humanity, of which she is the nursing mother. He might command His Bride to descend once again into the catacombs, or He may raise her on the thrones of kings. All we contend for is, that He has an equal right to adjudge either; and if we admit this principle,

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 25.

cordially and without reserve, nothing will startle us. And above all we shall not so easily take scandal at the course of events, or at the outward appearances which too often conceal for the present the glory of truth.

Without attempting to delineate beforehand what shall be the ways of Providence in the future history of the world and the Church, we have only to acknowledge His supremacy and earnestly desire His triumph. The theory of separating and excluding religion—which means God's claim upon us—from politics, from the State, and from government, is in itself as utterly false as the theory of separating it from our daily life. It is exactly all that which Jesus came to conquer by conquering the individual souls that make up the masses; behind the material veils, through the Sacraments, through the visible Church, and through the sovereign Pontiff and the hierarchy. These things, so few, so poor, so apparently weak and helpless, are the ultimate great moving powers of the world; before the hidden innate strength of which, the armies of nations and the wealth of monarchs is as the smoke of burning thorns.

Let us be patient even with evil, and above all patient with the weak. But let us never be patient with the material as posted up against the supernatural. It will not succeed. God will reign in His own universe, and will possess it.

Tenderly and gently as we would deal with those who cannot be brought to see that the theory of the supernatural—which is God's view of things, God's own theory—must be pushed to its ultimatum, we must guard ourselves and others against even a tacit opposition, or an attitude of mind which indicates reserve.

'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner. Whosoever shall fall on it shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it shall grind him to powder.'[1]

[1] Matt. xxi. 42, 44.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

In our first chapter we dwelt on the expectation of the old world waiting for the fulfilment of prophecy. We have contemplated the Creator daily revealing Himself to His creatures in the language of hope and promise. We have then traced Him as He is shown to us through the instrumentality of Mary, and the divine maternity. We have beheld Jesus as the Word made flesh, dwelling among men; and we have adored Him hidden in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar. From thence we have followed His blessed footsteps in the hierarchy and government of the Church, where by the eye of faith, we may find His presence down to the least of her rituals. They are the ceremonial of the King's court. And now let us contemplate our treasure, and make ourselves sure of what it is we possess. Is there more

to look for? Have we all within our reach which the misery and suffering of humanity demands? or is there something new, something unknown, yet to come? 'What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done?'

There are hearts still beating high with expectation of they know not what. There is a cry going up to heaven with every hour. And yet what more can be given, what more be required, to lead us to the peace of God?

God has given us Himself. Can we exhaust that? Impossible! But we can overlook even Him, in His own world. We can despise His gifts because we do not understand them, and we may carry the waters of life in defiled and earthen vessels, and so rob it of its regenerating and purifying properties. More, in kind, even the almighty Creator cannot give us. But He can give us grace to receive more in quantity, and faith and understanding to use it. This is what is needed, and this only, whether it be for the individual soul or for the nations of the earth.[1]

Everything is before us, everything is in

[1] Deuteronomy xxx. 11–14.

our own possession; only we do not use it. There are no new principles of virtue to be discovered, like the discovery of new chemicals. There is not even a new combination of existing virtues to be found out. 'It is the old path which is the good way.'[1]

Novelty belongs exclusively to human science and human art.[2] We shall never do much for ourselves individually in our own inner life, nor for others in the great suffering world around us, until we have fully taken to heart these two great truths. First, that all we want is there; and secondly, that it is only by individual application of these everlasting principles that we can do any good. The Church deals with the individual soul, and only with the masses as the aggregate of those individuals. No moral results will be lasting which are not produced upon the separate heart and the separate mind. You may sway the crowd for a time by the force of eloquence and the power of rhetoric. You may produce at the moment a sudden result for good or evil. But the crowd will disperse; and as each soul retires to the soli-

[1] Jeremias vi. 16.

[2] Even of these the fundamental principles are divine, and herefore eternal.

tude of its own existence, to the joy and sorrow of its own lot, it will be as the ever-widening ripples on the surface of the water on which you have flung a pebble; the effect will pass away into imperceptible distance, and leave no trace behind. When the Saints of former times—a Saint Francis Xavier, or a Saint Vincent Ferrere—converted hundreds by one discourse, each individual soul passed straight from the vivid effect of that wonderful eloquence, under the rule and guidance of the Church, not as one of a crowd, not as an accidental A or B who happened to be there, but as one special, individual soul—with its own special and peculiar sins, trials, and temptations—to be dealt with as such. There is always something in us which lives solitary, which dies in solitude, and which will stand alone before the judgment-seat of God. It is that solitary self that holds commune with the Spirit of God. It is to that single and isolated self that the Sacraments of God come in the plenitude of their power. It is there that God converses with us, either directly when we are in prayer, or through the ministrations of the Church. And if we would help others, if our hearts yearn over the souls

that are perishing, the crowds of miserable beings sunk in vice, destitution, and darkness, we must first believe that all we need for the great work of regeneration is already ours. And secondly that the work has to penetrate the individual soul, beginning with our own, and cannot be the result of either religious or political agitation; of prophesying new eras, producing revolutions, organising gigantic social changes, and upheaving with the inflation of wild and baseless hopes the wayward masses of mankind. It is not intended by anything we have said to depreciate the power and importance of public teaching, whether from the pulpit or the platform; but only to point out that whatever falls from the lips of the speaker bears real fruit only so far as it fits into the individual wants of individual hearers. You cannot console a crowd; because sorrow, like sin, takes a different form in each heart. But if you preach consolation your words may distil into this or that heart, and become adapted to the special individual want. You can only improve and elevate mankind in proportion as you raise the units of which the mass is formed. The old precepts of the Gospel put in practice

are all that is needed to produce every social, domestic, and personal reform. The sermon on the mount has not yet given out all its sweetness, and will bear a world-wide application, healing many wounds. We want nothing new, nothing recently invented or just about to be discovered, to bring happiness to mankind. God has not left His creation so long without granting it all it needs, if only we would see the fact and recognise it. The teaching is there, and the Teacher; and just so far as we learn it as individuals, and carry it on by our example and our efforts to other individuals, just so far shall we be working in that which is every man's business, be he high or low: namely 'working good to all men,' and thereby increasing the number of those to whom we are bound specially to do so—those who are of 'the household of the faith.'[1]

There is a trite old proverb, 'Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves,' and it is singularly applicable to our subject. Get at the single hearts, and you will get at the welfare of all mankind. We need

[1] Galatians vi. 10.

very few great schemes, but we need millions of little ones; you and I—each, and so all—must have our scheme of personal reform and of general improvement. It is true there is much which is disappointing to our nature in a process at once so slow and so hidden. All desires are larger than their results, at least so far as the result is evident to our perceptions. The intensity of longing, the yearning to effect our purpose, the inward commotion and perhaps hidden restlessness, of all these we are painfully conscious; and it takes these with their accompanying wear and tear of intellectual and physical sinew and muscle, to produce effects scarcely perhaps perceptible to ourselves, though possibly more evident to bystanders. The whole of our threescore years—even were they given up entirely to doing the work for which we were sent, namely that of preparing for the kingdom and sovereignty of God in His own world—would make but one thread in the divinely woven web of the great scheme; and when from this brief life we subtract the years of wasted energy, or worse still of ill-directed force, we find but a fragment of our life left in our hands to weave for God. Neverthe-

less this slow and obscure work, all that we have to give, is imperatively demanded of us. The success lies beyond us, in the hands of infinite wisdom, and with it we have nothing to do. How strange that sounds to human ears, in a world where only success commands admiration or even toleration; and how this great truth that we must leave results with God, brings forward once more the wonderful principle of hiddenness which forms the great characteristic of the Divine Government. Because this truth grows out of the great theological doctrine that the motive alone gives value to the act; and that motive is for the most part hidden from all but God Himself, hidden at least in its complexity and its intensity. Thus while we are propelled by every law, human and divine, to outward action, we are at the same time subtly drawn inward by the fact that the only real value of the apparent action is attached to the concealed inner source or motive.

It is mystery within mystery, ever more involved, ever more pointing to the God who hideth Himself.

We come back to the point we have already urged in relation to the individual inner life;

namely the importance of taking a large and deep view of the great truths, and living upon them as the main springs of our devotion and our practice. This will do more for us, and more in its results for our neighbours, than all the breaking-up of our thoughts and energies into a vast number of lesser devotions, and the joining of many confraternities. These are excellent in their intention. The Church has authorised them and blessed them. Like an indulgent mother she will have every want, nay almost every innocent idiosyncrasy, met and provided for in her numerous offspring; therefore are they all good in their way, and that way is a profitable and a holy one. But they will not answer any purpose if they are to pamper our restless appetite for change and for small petty activities, which only serve as a mask to our real idleness; or if they take the place of the solid, steady, hard-working, self-denying practice of the rule of life our Blessed Lord has given us in the Gospel. This or that form of prayer, however indulgenced, is never a panacea for this or that evil. The form is good, especially if authorised by the Church. But it is superstition to act as if we vaguely supposed

that any particular form will *per se*, and as a necessary sequence, bring a particular grace. It is the disposition of heart finding utterance through the form, that gains grace; because this disposition is the Spirit Himself asking for us, and 'He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth, because He asketh for the saints according to God.'[1]

This seems too obvious to need repetition. But what save an unacknowledged but very wide-spread and common superstition, could lead to so much external devotion as we see around us: saying of rosaries, joining confraternities, haunting the churches, reciting prayers; combined with scarcely a touch of the 'charity that thinketh no evil,' of the perseverence in well-doing, of the meek and peace-making temper, and of real honest hatred of the spirit of this world, or absence of human respect? Our devotions too often resemble a pot of honey, with a buzz of venial sins like clouds of flies hovering around and utterly defiling it. Daily Mass and daily gossip; rosaries and the spirit of personal criticism;

[1] Romans viii. 26, 27.

enormous waste of time and a predilection for benediction; a taste for vespers and a taste for dress and luxury; a snappish temper and a love for lenten sermons. With all this we neither evangelize ourselves nor our neighbours. It is the whited sepulchre over again, and alas! the homes of the living are full of these tenements of dead bones. The whole is covered over with the frequenting of pious associations, and constantly renewed and lengthened conferences with our spiritual director, and who is often made director of a great deal which has nothing to do with his priestly functions, and only requires that amount of common sense which everybody is bound to possess. An army of Theresas and Catherines would have found their way to Heaven through all kinds of supernatural states, with one fouth part of what these silly souls demand to keep them happily at their night and morning prayers. 'These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone.' There is no panacea except union with God; and outward practices are only valuable as conducing to that. They are means to an end. But if the real end be not obtained by them, they cannot remain

without result. And that result is the awful one of a false conscience—a cloak of hypocrisy, deceiving our soul and vitiating our judgment. It is this wide-spread abuse of practices which almost makes us grieve at their multiplicity. The seal of the Church reassures us as regards all she has truly sanctioned. But even so, may it not, as it were, be a poor compliment our great Mother is constrained to pay us in these degenerate days, when she who is ever in herself—(in all her essential rites, in the exquisitely delineated laws of her rubrics, which contain a whole body of practical theology)—so grand, so exact, and so full of a deep inner sense, has allowed such endless diversity in the off-shoots of private devotion? While permitting it, may she not sometimes regret the noble simplicity of earlier ages when her children chose more solid food, and craved less for variety. It is not by these that she has fashioned her greatest and noblest saints. These are only the nets in which she catches the minnows. Religion, piety, and devotion, is not a military discipline, nor a thing to be regulated by the ringing of a bell. It is the state of the soul as before God. It is only consonant with simplicity, earnestness

and self-denial. People talk and act as if they believed it were some sort of mechanical work in which you drop one thread and take up another. It more resembles a beautiful mosaic where valuable stones in minute proportions, are laid down with exquisite design to produce a picture that is to last for ever. We are all, or nearly all, too much in danger of making our piety artificial, and not a living part of ourselves. The exterior is regulated like the motions of a piston, while the interior works at will, living a separate life from the outward appearance. We make our very souls into the unconscious prayer-mills of the eastern fanatic, and flutter little petitions and practices unheeding through the day, like the fragments of paper turned round by the handle of his machine. We are satisfying our itching for outward activity, and at the same time losing sight of ourselves and of God.

We want less talking about outward circumstances; less craving for advice and sympathy; less fabrication of intricate mental difficulties, where a little simplicity and christian straightforwardness would set all clear, and enable us to see our path well before us. If we acquired

the habit of contemplating God more and ourselves less, these miseries would die out of us, and we should stand face to face with the great thought of God and of Eternity. We should go more frequently to the very elements of holiness, the gospel precepts, the words of our beloved Lord, the divine teaching of 'Blessed are the meek,' 'Blessed are the clean of heart,' 'Blessed are the peacemakers;' and *living on* upon these precepts we should find that the faith which God has given us in His Church is one which is adapted to all times, all places, and all circumstances. It does not necessitate a certain fashion of life, a certain position, a certain forced combination of events. We carry it with us wherever God's providence sends us—even sometimes, in exceptional cases, beyond the reach of the sacraments for a longer or shorter period. Of course the enjoyment of these is the first point in the life of a Catholic. All the rest is secondary. All except duty must be sacrificed to possess them. But sometimes even they are withheld; as with those at sea, those travelling, or stationary by duty in heathen lands. It is hard; but God is everywhere, and in unknown and unseen modes gives

Himself to every soul that seeks Him. This is certain; for nothing which is in the course of God's Providence towards us can absolve every one of us from the obligation to become a saint, each according to his degree. And yet this would be impossible if God never permitted His creature to approach Him except within certain limits and under certain rules. The laws He has made He can dispense with: all, save the law of His own being, which is the law of love. And that is the law of giving and communicating. God who is love, will no more refuse Himself to the hope of the dying than the stream will refuse its waters to the thirsty deer.[1]

Whatever He puts beyond our reach—whether it be a superior guide for our souls, a particular place, a special combination of external circumstances, or even the frequenting the sacraments—He can and will supply the loss in Himself and by Himself. Of course this does not apply to those who from worldly motives, or a tempting of God's providence, or a wilful withdrawing themselves from the light make their own dis-

[1] St. Bernard.

advantageous circumstances, and then abide by them. As little does it apply to those who stand outside the one true Church from an unwillingness to investigate her claims. This is an act of conscious and wilful disobedience; and even where only partially conscious and partially indeliberate, yet is it still a grave omission—grave in proportion to the weighty importance of the matter concerned, which is no less than the transcendent question of how we shall possess Him without whom we have no life.

But wherever we find ourselves inside the fold of God's will, as revealed to us by circumstances, there may we find salvation; the first fold of His will being that of the Catholic Church, the second that amount of her ministrations which is compatible with our individual lot, and the state of life in which God's providence has placed us. 'Dieu s'explique par son premier ministre au département de ce monde le temps.'[1] And as this is true in the history of the world, so is it true in the life of the individual. Let us be patient, and not hurry on

[1] De Maistre.

conclusions. Whatever our lot and wherever cast, we have Jesus as our great exemplar. We are to tread in His footsteps; and lest the heights before us should seem impossible to climb, and the valleys too deep and dark, He has given us His divine Mother as our companion and our guide. The habit of her life was with Him, and the external developments of that life illustrate in the fullest sense the true course of the inner life of each of us. The subject is too vast for us to enter upon largely here. We can but delineate a few of the leading features, that we may pasture our souls upon the rich thoughts they bring before us. First, the whole life of man is one of expectation. But the life of the soul detached from the engrossing nature of earthly ties, and aspiring after the hidden and the supernatural, is especially a life of waiting and expecting. Like Mary during the nine months when her babe was with her, but hidden from her eyes, we carry our treasure in our hearts, not for months only, but for life.

His Divine Image will grow in our souls and become perfected as the babe grows in its mother's womb. But as it needs to partake of her life, and that to sustain her offspring she

must sustain her own existence, so must we lend our co-operation to the forming of the divine likeness in ourselves. If we are unheeding of the work that should go on within us, we stop its progress as certainly as the mother would arrest the growth of her infant by refusing food; nay, the subtle touches and tender lineaments needed to transcribe the Image of Jesus in our hearts transcend in evanescent delicacy all possible comparisons; while in the spiritual life the expectation of possessing Him is blended with the rendering Him service, as being actually present with us. For He is in all around us, and specially in His poor; and still more specially in His Church. Nothing is lost which is done for His sake, from the cup of cold water to death at the stake. Our life teems with occasions, like the natural round of one day of twenty-four hours in the mysterious and silent house of Nazareth, where every act—the kindling of fire, the baking of bread, the cleaning of the house—had the aspect and the momentous importance of a great function with priests and prelates, and all that man can bring together to express magnificent homage to the Lord of Lords. We think we

understand something of this last. It strikes our senses, appeals to our imagination, and so enlists our sympathies. But the same Divine Presence was lying hid beneath the low flat roof of the House at Nazareth. And the same Divine Presence is seeking to come and dwell with us and make Its abode with us, if we will love Him and keep His word—as Mary did! It is of the nature of all typical and allegorical teaching to localise itself, and concentrate in one individual as in a focus, what is of other and sometimes of general application. Thus throughout the Scriptures, what is true of Mary is true of the Church in her character of the Spouse of Christ. And what Mary as the Mother of God, did and suffered, represents in a transcendant degree what each individual soul that goes to make up the great body of the Church, must do and suffer in the inner life. Thus the Church in the book of Proverbs is personified as Wisdom, who hath built herself a house and hewn her out seven pillars. This, which is applicable to the Church is equally applicable to Mary, who foreshadows the Church in her own person, her acts, and her participation in our Lord's sufferings.

Her seven dolours, connected as they are

with seven mysteries in the life of our Lord, represent the pillars of that edifice—that temple to the Lord we must build in our own souls. There is no spiritual growth without suffering. There is no love on earth without the pangs of love; and here, when the object of our love is the Great Victim, and it is for us that He has bled, it is only by a participation in Mary's dolours that like Mary we can dwell with Him in the secret recesses of our soul.

'Thine own soul a sword shall pierce' comes whispering on the air from the first step down into the deep shadows of the inner life, till we shall come forth into the glory beyond. And as we call Him by His sweet name of Jesus, our hearts bleed at the memory of what it cost Him of innocent infant blood to make that name our watchword and our hope. No sooner is He ours than we must conceal Him in the inmost recesses of our hearts, lest the world should tear Him from us. We go down into the arid deserts of our own being, carrying Jesus with us; and we dwell far away in spirit from the sweet natural joys and ties of common life, in the land of exile. At least in Egypt we possess Him, and as He walks

through the temples of our hearts, the old idols fall broken before Him. But this life of an exile even with the possession of Jesus, is not for ever; and back to the claims of greater activity and more danger we turn our trembling steps. And here, alas! amid the intricacies of life He hides Himself, and we lose Him or seem to lose Him, that we may thus be driven to seek Him, sorrowing.

We must go forth to meet Him bearing His cross, and ascend Mount Calvary with Him. There not like Mary standing, but crouching with Magdalene, we must learn all the bitterness of sin and the depth of divine love.

Then the sharper anguish of the suffering in life is over; and the deeper anguish of the silence, as of death, comes upon the soul. Nor is that all. A darker sorrow yet remains. He has ceased to speak to us, for death has sealed those beautiful lips. Still we hold the sacred and most beloved Remains. But even that must be taken from us. And as He is carried within the dark portals of the tomb, our heart goes with Him; and what remains to us is the life of pure faith, in the night of the soul, waiting for the morn of the resurrection.

These are the seven pillars of the spiritual house; and they have to be hewn out of our very substance.

Or again, if like Mary we would dwell with Jesus, we must follow Him whithersoever He goeth; and we must only expect to find Him there where He went Himself, conquering and to conquer. The first progress of our blessed Lord when He came to dwell on earth was to Jerusalem, whither Mary and Joseph carried Him. The commencement of the spiritual life is in the bright and beautiful city, with the blessed Infant whose tender form has not yet known a rougher touch than the soft hands of Mary (save during the cruel humiliations of the circumcision); and though the deep shadow of the cross lay on that little heart whose rapid pulsations Mary had so often watched and felt, yet there is all the grace, and the unutterably tender pathos of beautiful infancy in its most perfect aspect, to cheer and delight our hearts.

The beginning of the deeper life is like a foretaste of heaven. A new sun has dawned on us, and the towers and pinnacles of God's own chosen place glisten in the rosy light of

morning. Gladness fills our hearts as when ourselves we were children, and nothing would be hard if it might all be like the new day in the beautiful city with the Infant Jesus. But whither He goes, we must follow Him. His enemies are ours, and already have they caused Him to fly from Jerusalem to Egypt. Now Egypt means darkness, and there is no full development of the interior life save in the night of the spirit, in faith without sight. Trial, and temptation—the shadow of the old heathen temple, where once we worshipped other gods, and the arid trackless sands around us—must all bear their part in the great work that Jesus has begun in our souls.

In vain we strain our eyes to catch sight of the lofty towers of the city of David—the city of peace. In vain we long to hear the musical ripple of her many fountains, and to walk within the shadows of her glorious temple. These things are far away from us now and we are learning the bitterness of sin in the land of darkness; until still with Jesus, we have gained courage to go out into the wilderness and take mortification and penance for our lot. Yes! there too shall we find Him, for He the

Sinless One, has been before us, not for His own sake but for ours.

And when we have thus followed Jesus to Jerusalem in the gladness of our conversion, to Egypt in the bitterness of repentance, and to the wilderness in the zeal of self-mortification, we shall learn how Jesus stands on the pinnacle of the temple in the persons of the fathers and doctors of the Church, to expound His will and His word, not in the arrogance of spiritual pride, but in the simple teaching of the gospel. And again shall we find Jesus, in the august person of the sovereign pontiff, on that mountain from whence He looks down on the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them—the unseen spiritual power gazing calmly on the seen and the palpable; the weak things of this world confounding the strong; things that are not, bringing to naught things that are;[1] the hidden and the supernatural being the only reality, and the loud, the dominant, and the aggressive being as nothing before Him.

Our progress with Jesus will always land us

[1] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

on the mountain height, safe from the rushing waters of sin and the waves of trial with the true Church, of which the ark was the antitype. It is there only that we can be secure from the surging deluge of doubt in its protean forms; it is there alone that we shall vanquish the last temptation,[1] and be able in the strength of Another, to say, 'Begone Satan.'

The time is short and the days are evil; and as yet what have we done? Are we resting with God in the secret of our souls, or have we gone forth from our stonghold where we were dwelling as the prisoners of hope, to fraternise with the busy throng around us? Do the large pretensions of the world obscure too often to our weak sight the all-absorbing claims of the hidden and the supernatural? The wisdom of the world is very eloquent and very plausible; and it has carefully written in its vocabulary words and terms which we once thought were exclusively our own. We had fancied that the welfare of mankind, progress and civilisation, the happiness of the majority, and the instruc-

[1] The order of the three temptations of our Lord is differently stated in the Gospel of St. Luke. That of St. Matthew is the one here followed.

tion of the masses, were phrases of which we knew the sense, and sciences of which we held the key. Now we are bidden stand aside as ignorant and foolish, while they are gradually evolving chaos back again under cover of regenerating humanity.

It seems almost easier, and certainly pleasanter, to believe them and to go forth and lend our aid; or at least, with reserved approbation silently to look on. It is hard to be always rowing up-stream, as our companions shoot past us borne on the smooth current, and singing of bright shores beyond. It is still harder to make them turn from us with disdain or hatred, by calling out to them that they have mistaken the track and will perish among the rapids.

And yet this we must do. If we have not begun let us not lose another hour. Let us range ourselves once and for all on God's side, take His view of things, adopt His principles to the utmost, carry His science to the ultimate climax; lean on it with all our weight, trusting our weakness to its everlasting strength, and believe that it will never break under us.

The work to be done is enormous, and the

weapons for our warfare are not those borne by our opponents. Hermits in thought, anchorites in prayer if possible, we must be men of action to all around us whenever the occasion presents itself. Nothing less than the most strenuous individual effort—in our own hearts first of all, in our homes, in our social circles, and in the world around, so far as we can reach—will avail us anything in these perilous times. Let us take care that we be whole-hearted in God's cause, and let us firmly believe that His cause will triumph in the end. Is it nothing to be so sure of being on the winning side? What soldier would lay down his arms if he knew the victory must be his? We are dazzled by the pomp and splendour of the enemies' forces. Ours, indeed, always seems to be the losing side; for we are opposing silence to clamour, weakness to strength, poverty to riches.

A hidden God, a dismantled Church, an infirm and aged Pontiff; the prayers of women and children; the penances of nameless ascetics, the cry of the poor; the silent sacraments, the brooding of the unseen Spirit—these are our

weapons. These are the means to the end. These are the hosts of the Lord.

'Return to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope! I will render thee double, as I declare to-day; and I will raise up thy sons, O Sion, above *thy* sons O Greece, and I will make thee as the sword of the mighty.'[1]

[1] Zacharias ix. 12, 13.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A, *page* 28.

THE antecedent will of God is that with respect to the object in itself, without abstraction made of circumstances.

St. John Damascene calls it 'the will of goodness and of mercy.' The 'consequent will' is that which considers the object attended by all its circumstances. St. John calls this the 'will of justice.'—See note by the Abbé Drioux to the Summa of St. Thomas, quest. 19, article 6.

'God wills with an antecedent will that every soul should be saved, but He wills with a consequent will that certain should be damned for the satisfaction of His justice.'—Summa of St. Thomas, quest. 19, Art. 6.

NOTE B, *page* 38.

'Apprenons que selon le langage du Sauveur, qui est celui de la vérité, tout ce qui est tems n'est qu'un point, et moins que rien; et que ce qui dure, ce qui est, véritablement, c'est l'éternité, qui ne passe jamais.

Comptons pour rien ce qui passe. Il y a dix dèpres-sept cents ans depuis l'ascension de notre Seigneur, et tout cela, devant Jésus-Christ, qui est le Père du siècle futur (Is. ix. 6), n'est peut-être qu'une très-petite partie de tout le tems qui se trouvera du jour de l'ascension à la fin du monde, que Jésus-Christ a compté pour rien. Les siècles sont donc moins que rien ; mille ans valent moins qu'un jour selon cette mesure.'—BOSSUET, *Méditations sur l'Évangile*, 29me jour.

NOTE C, *page* 52.

It has been reserved for the aberrations of modern philosophy, as we find it taking rise in the wayward mind of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to explain the origin of the social condition of humanity as the result of fortuitous accident. The ancients were wiser and more consequent. Aristotle represents man as essentially and necessarily the member of a family system from the first. He takes the family as the type and basis of all forms of government. The Father, as Head of the family, typifies the monarchical form ; the husband and wife, united in power, the oligarchal ; and the children, brothers and sisters living together in equality, as the democratic power.

According to the great father of philosophy, the family lies at the base of all social existence—that existence for which man was created.

There is no isolation in the Being of God ; and there is none in the works that have come from His hand.

Modern philosophers are diametrically opposed to this view, which is the one revealed to us in the Scriptures. The question cannot be handled here. But it may be observed that they prove too much. Sir John Lubbock, for instance, in his account of savage life, seems to deprive the sexes of the mutual attraction and admiration which exist in the lowest animals and even in insects, and which is at the base of the formation of the family ties. As he believes the savage to be the original man, according to him the principle of the family is far more developed in a litter of puppies than it was in our early progenitors.

Note D, *page* 53.

O âme, entendez donc bien, avec la sainte et pleine logique du cœur, avec la saine raison de la nature non mutilée, que, puisque vous avez trouvé dans ce monde, en y venant, cette merveilleuse création de Dieu, la famille, et, par l'amour paternel et la providence maternelle, la vie donnée à ce qui n'était pas, entretenue et suppléée en ce qui ne pouvait pas ; par cela seul il est certain qu'il y a une éternelle et toute-puissante paternité pour tous les hommes unis, aussi bien que pour tous les hommes isolés.

Note E, *page* 54.

Knowledge must always precede the exercise of the affections. We must know God before we can feel, love, fear, hope, or trust towards Him.

The formula which embodies a dogma for the theo-

logian readily suggests an object for the worshipper. In religion the imagination and the affections should always be under the control of reason. Theology may stand as a substantive science without religion; but religion cannot maintain its ground without theology. Sentiment, whether imaginative or emotional, falls back on the intellect as its stay when sense cannot be called into exercise, and it is in this way that devotion falls back upon dogma.[1]

Note F, *page* 86.

While preparing these pages for the press we have become acquainted with the second part of the 'Formation of Christendom,' by Mr. Allies, and cannot resist giving our readers the following quotation from this valuable work:—

'Christ named Himself the Truth because He is the son and the Word of the Father. "Thus the Father, as it were uttering Himself, begot His Word, equal to Himself in all things. For he would not fully and perfectly have uttered Himself, if there were anything less or anything more in His Word than in Himself. . . . And therefore this word is truly the Truth, inasmuch as whatever is in that knowledge of which He is begotten is also in Himself; and whatsoever is not in it is not in Himself. . . . The Father and the Son know each other, the one by generating, the other by being generated."[2]

[1] Grammar of Assent, Newman, p. 117.

[2] St. Augustin de Trin. I. xv. 14 Tom. viii. 984.

Thus it is that he is the perfect Word, the absolute Image of God; and being the image of God He created Man in the beginning a copy of that Image, and according to Its resemblance in that, He created him in the indivisible unity of a soul intelligent and willing—a created copy of the Trinity in unity.'

Again we quote from the 'Formation of Christendom.' 'The Apostles established in the Church seven great rites, encompassing the whole of human life. The regenerating power, which was the beginning of the whole change which they sought to work in man, was stored up in one; the confirming and developing it in a second; the feeding and increasing it in a third; the removal of obstacles to it in a fourth; the supporting and restoring the human nature so elevated, when under pressure of sickness and in fear of death, in a fifth; the blessing and consecrating the union of the species in a sixth; and finally, the conferring that distinctive power which transmitted through all ages her Lord's gift to the Church in a seventh.

'This is that great and marvellous sacramental system by which the Church, dowered, as we have said, in her quality of Bride, with her Lord's blood, applies that blood to his members, according to their needs. *This is the perpetual consecration of matter to a supernatural end, of which the highest example is found in the Body of the Head Himself; and so it is an enfolding of human nature with the Incarnation, and a transforming it into the image of its Head.*'

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